MISSING
IN BERLIN
By WILLIAM
McGIVERN

argosy

Wolf Mankowitz

Alan Sillitoe

Simenon

Nicholas
Monsarrat

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POLLYANDRA

BY
WOLF
MANKOWITZ

POLLYANDRA Perkins had large violet eyes, glossy chestnut hair, a small waist, large bust, well-turned though overlong legs, a shorthand speed of 130, and no moral sense whatsoever. She was therefore perfectly fitted for success in a man's world.

Not that Pollyandra was loose in her behaviour. This child of Surbiton had too profound a belief in the sanctity of property to throw her own around without a contractually assured profit. After a juvenile incident with a car salesman who had misrepresented himself as a racing driver with the usual consequences to romantic girls of nineteen, Pollyandra never again gave any man more than a brief intoxicating sight of her assets.

Thus she came at last, after a number of secretarial appointments which always terminated in unprofessional demands from her employers, to the conclusion that a less dangerous profession, one in which her talents would be paid for without being purchased, might suit her better than office work.

Following an introduction from a girl who had been to the Dame School with her in Surbiton, Pollyandra called on Maurice, the Maître d' of the Blue Arabian Club off Old Bond Street. He immediately hired her. Within a few weeks Pollyandra became the club's least available and therefore most sought-after night-club hostess, sometimes re-selling before four in the morning no less than eight fluffy teddy bears at five guineas apiece back to the management at fifty per cent discount.

Maurice knew well the type of trade to direct towards Pollyandra. Lancashire cotton men, American film stars, Middle-Eastern oil sheiks, and similar high-pressure punters, could come only to a dead end, bad temper, and the small bill to which frustration always reduces night-club clients. For Pollyandra he reserved the more serious-minded—accountants, solicitors, elder stockbrokers, senior members of Lloyd's, and such-like inhibited

intellectuals. With this quiet carriage trade Pollyandra was an unexceptional success, conducting herself like a lady in her own right and maintaining the conversation at a level which never rose, even in the hot hours of the morning, above the knee.

One evening during the Motor Show when the Blue Arabian was packed almost to capacity with the lower class of client, and every hostess in the place—with the exception of Pollyandra—was fully employed dancing, ordering more champagne, buying fluffy teddy bears, chocolates, and cigarettes—only available in the carton of one hundred—Maurice was delighted to see three distinguished middle-aged gentlemen enter the club for a night-cap after what had clearly been a most hearty reunion dinner.

Any uncertainty the three gentlemen may have had about Pollyandra's ability to entertain them all vanished when Maurice introduced her. The champagne was called for, the teddy bear bought, and an orchid and a large box of chocolates added to it in spite of Pollyandra's insincere protests.

"Please," said the first gentleman, whose name was Tony, "please do accept."

"Indeed you must," said the second gentleman, whose name was Arturo.

"We absolutely insist," said the third gentleman. He was called Karl.

"You see," explained Tony, "we meet every ten years to see how much richer we have become."

They all laughed happily, and though Pollyandra laughed with them, she looked puzzled.

"I explain," explained Arturo. "Once there was six of us."

"Dashing devils we were," continued Tony. "Up at Oxford and game for anything."

"There, you must understand," Karl continued in his more precise manner, "we joined together."

"Sort of blood brothers?" hazarded Pollyandra, thinking it not at all strange that female spiders consume their idiot males.

"Even closer," Tony said, and continued his explanation.

The six of them, knowing full well their common talent for wasting their substance, had used a large part of their private fortunes to buy a mutual life insurance policy. The interest that accrued from this heavy investment was year by year added to the capital and, following the gambling spirit of their wild youth, it was agreed that whichever of the six outlived the others, should collect the vast fortune which was to continue to accumulate until that time.

Pollyandra was too well mannered to ask exactly how much was involved, but as she danced with one after the other of the three gentlemen, she managed to extract from each his phone number.

As the evening drew to its close, Tony sighed and said, "What a happy occasion this has been for the three of us, gentlemen."

To which Arturo replied, "Let us drink to the memories of Jock, and Jean, and little Sandy."

Tony raised his glass. "Not lost," he said, "but gone before."

Karl heavily pointed out, "Leaving us each twice as hopeful."

"Not to mention your widows—I mean your wives," added Pollyandra.

"Not so, dear lady," hooted Tony, "happy bachelors we." And together they sang some kind of punting song.

So the three happy, mutually insured bachelor gentlemen, their arms mutually entwined, exited into the fresh pre-dawn air of Old Bond Street, after kissing Pollyandra in the most gentlemanly manner and with only the briefest of regretful backward glances towards her beautiful, thoughtful face, ghost-like in the gloom of the Blue Arabian behind them.

And later that morning Karl returned to his motor car factory at Munich, Tony flew back to his diplomatic post in Copenhagen, and Arturo caught a plane to his couture house in Rome.

In the next ten nights Pollyandra worked through no less than forty clients. To her twenty guineas hostess fees, her twenty-five pounds tips, and her fifteen pounds commission on fluffy bears, Pollyandra added her savings from the British Linen Bank in Piccadilly—their cheques gave her a sense of exclusive security she particularly enjoyed—and with a capital of something under five hundred pounds, resigned her post at the Blue Arabian, to the regret of Maurice and numerous solicitors, accountants, and elderly stockbrokers, but to the delight of all the other hostesses. And since that time no more has been heard in London of Pollyandra Perkins.

But in Copenhagen, the good fortune of a diplomat at the British Embassy in having acquired so delicious an escort was generally remarked upon. Then, when diplomatic circles were whispering of an imminent end to dear Tony's long bachelorhood, the unfortunate First Secretary fell from the highest point of the Ferris wheel in Luna Park. After which sad event, Pollyandra was never again seen in Copenhagen.

But in Munich the solid Bavarian burghers and their fraus, sitting in the stuffy lounge of the very best hotel digesting their rich knödel and sauerkraut, grunted at the appearance of yet another beautiful model in the company of a well-known local rake. Karl, however, forced a faster demise upon himself than had Tony, for the Germanic lover is peculiar and imperative and rather more difficult to keep at bay than his Anglo-Saxon counterpart. After a particularly wild Western-German party poor drunken Karl was found dead of carbon monoxide fumes in the driver's seat of his own factory's new model sports car. A few torn sequins which had lately glittered on Pollyandra's best dress were found on the garage floor, and the material on them matched the shreds in Karl's nails. But Pollyandra herself was never again seen in Munich.

Arturo owed his survival for several weeks after he married her to the fact that he was in the couture business which Pollyandra felt she would need a few months to study under his master-guidance before taking over. But after a few weeks the ravishing signora of Arturo of Rome found the Latin lover's formula—large boasts with minimum performance plus paranoidal jealousy—insupportable. Arturo died in the middle of creating his master-piece, a sheath dress composed entirely of dried fish scales. His death was attributed to the strychnine content of the powerful

glue he used without regard for his personal safety, showing the world once more the calibre of Roman couturiers.

At Arturo's magnificent funeral the catafalque was decorated with purple-plumed fishtails and followed by more than a hundred weeping black-draped models and seamstresses led by the widow, whose weeds ravished the city. Afterwards Pollyandra quietly settled down to the routine of running a great fashion house, waiting patiently for the insurance claim which she had filed on behalf of her deeply-lamented husband to come through.

Investigation by her lawyers revealed that the policy taken out by the six wild young men—now alas, all deceased—some thirty years previously, was worth something under a quarter of a million pounds sterling, which means an infinite number of lire. Pollyandra opened a lonely bottle of champagne and raised her glass in silent toast to Arturo and Karl and Tony, not to mention those other carefree bachelors who had died without her help, Jock and Jean and little Sandy.

The old efficient wheels of the insurance company ground exceeding slowly but with excessive care through Pollyandra's claim. Yet the most careful investigations could reveal nothing other than the indisputable fact that Arturo, Karl, Tony, Jock, and Jean were thoroughly dead and registered as such. But as for little Sandy—the company's letter explained—there was no documentation of this gentleman's death. In fact, when last heard of, he was living on a remittance sent monthly by an aged aunt to a poste restante in Tangier.

In due course Pollyandra descended upon the formerly exciting international port now totally dead under a Moroccan puritan regime. Choosing the most palatial of all the empty suites in the Riff Hotel, she settled down, a ravishing heartbroken widow, to a few weeks of quiet and—the rumour had it at Dean's Bar—the hope of finding consolation.

One morning consolation introduced itself to Pollyandra in the form of a handsome, tanned, youthfully middle-aged rakehell and beachcomber, his hair still glinting sandy-red between the attractive streaks of silver-grey.

Little Sandy—so called because he was of unusual height—had found the pickings in Tangier deplorably thin since the playgirls of Europe deserted the place at the same time as the international bankers. And if the wealthy widow of a famous Italian couturier hadn't suddenly appeared and—Sandy could hardly believe his luck—seemed eager to be consoled, he would have very soon to return to Europe and forfeit his remittance.

As it was, a whirlwind romance of a few days after a chance meeting in the Petit Socco, carefully arranged by both of them,

led to a civic marriage ceremony and a honeymoon in the Atlas mountains which, Sandy and Pollyandra discovered to their surprise, they both more than enjoyed.

However, love as all agree has its price and for Pollyandra it was very high. For Sandy it was only his freedom and whatever a Roman couture house was worth on the open market. So, in spite of the growing affection between them, Pollyandra attempted to push Sandy over a precipice, poison him with carbon monoxide fumes, and sprinkle strychnine in his couscous. But a beach-combing Irish gentleman of thirty years' experience is not so easily killed.

Similarly, a Surbiton-bred ex-night-club hostess is not too easily disposed of, especially when she is as ravishing and as suspicious as Pollyandra. Sandy attempted all the means of disposal available to a gentleman, but in the cases where he didn't weaken, Pollyandra dodged his devices. The lovers had reached a stalemate.

Finally, late one afternoon, when the newlyweds had taken a picnic of variously poisoned delicacies and climbed one of the lower peaks of the Atlas to admire the superb view and push one another off, Pollyandra and Sandy decided to call it quits.

So, as the sun sets gloriously over the Atlas mountains, we leave Pollyandra in the arms of a husband whose claim upon a quarter of a million pounds—quite enough, after all, for two to live upon—is an entirely legitimate one. It will be paid out quite soon now, completing the happiness of one of the best matched couples ever brought together by that devious female bawd so wrongly described as Mother. We mean that perversely eccentric beldame, Nature.

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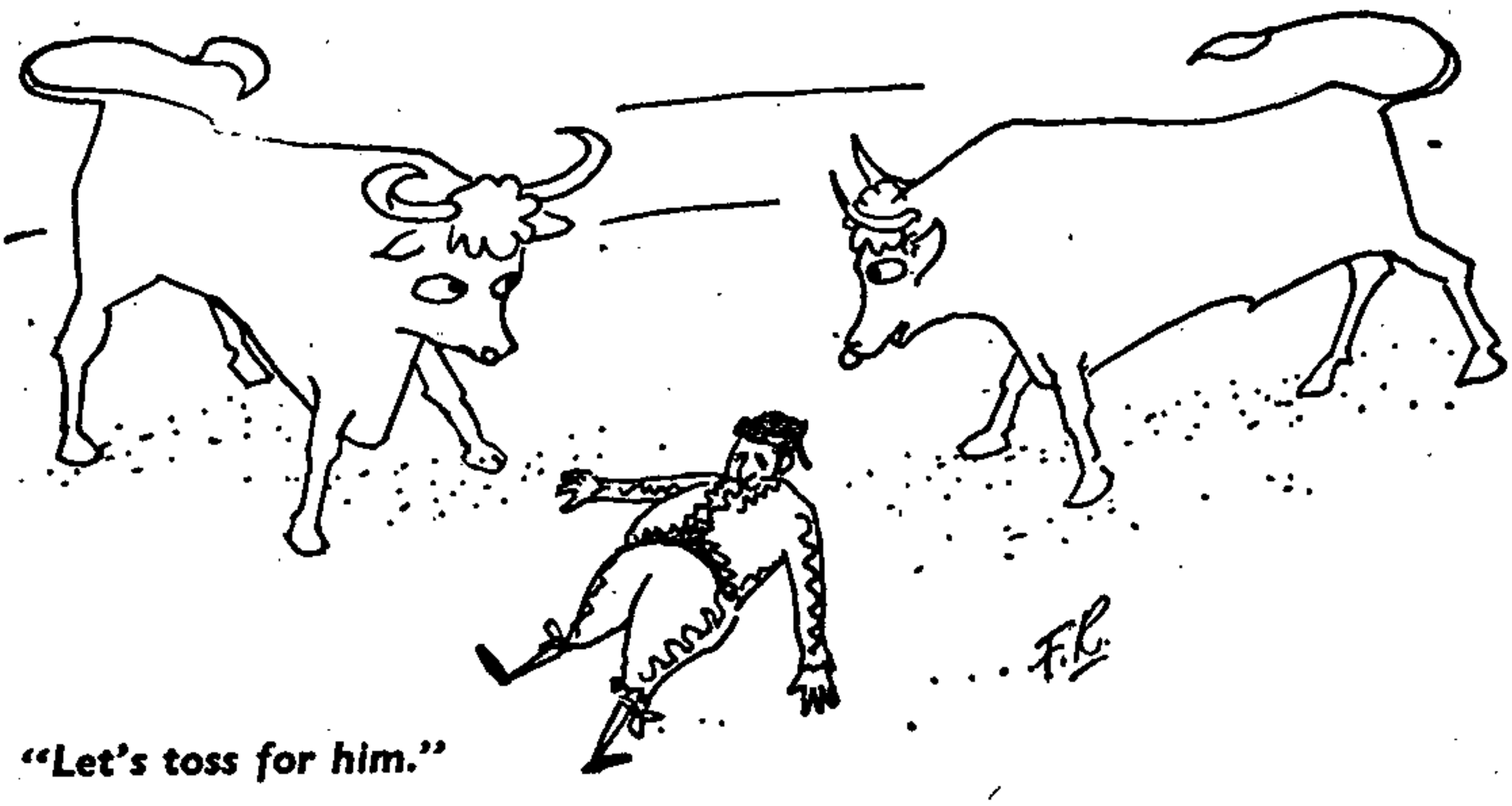


"Let's toss for him."

Air on a Ladle

She gave them some broth without any bread
And spanked them all soundly and sent them to bed.

The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe

Is it Paris, or Kitchener, Reader, exhorts
You whenever your stomach's at all out of sorts,
To try, if you find richer viands won't stop in it
A basin of good mutton broth with a chop in it?
However, it's clear
That with sound table beer
Such a mess as I speak of is very good cheer;
Especially too
When a person's wet through
And is hungry, and tired, and don't know what to do.
Now just such a mess of delicious hot pottage
Was smoking away when they enter'd the cottage.

R. H. BARHAM, *Ingoldsby Legends*

Soup Through a Straw

"The soup is hot," said Gerard.

"But how are we to get it to our mouths?" inquired the senior, despondingly.

"Father, the young man has brought us straws." And Margaret smiled slily . . .

Gerard whipped the flask off the fire, wedged it in between the stones, and put the hat under the old man's nose with a merry smile. The other tremulously inserted the pipe of rye-straw and sucked. Lo and behold, his wan, drawn face was seen to light up more and more, till it quite glowed; and as soon as he had drawn a long breath: "Hippocrates and Galen!" he cried, "'tis soupe au vin—the restorative of restoratives . . ."

"Why brought you but two straws?"

"Fair mistress, I hoped you would let me put my lips to your straw, there being but two."

Margaret smiled and blushed. "Never beg that you may command," said she. "The straw is not mine, 'tis yours: you cut it in yonder field."

CHARLES READE, *The Cloister and the Hearth*

Consummate Consommé

A meal begun with Blagg's Tomato
Softens every husband's heart-oh.
Hubbies hold those wives most dear
Who serve them up Blagg's Turtle Clear.
Fit for an Alderman—serve it up quick
Rum-ti-ti, tum-ti-ti, Blagg's Turtle Thick.

DOROTHY L. SAYERS, *Murder Must Advertise*

Soup on a Shoestring

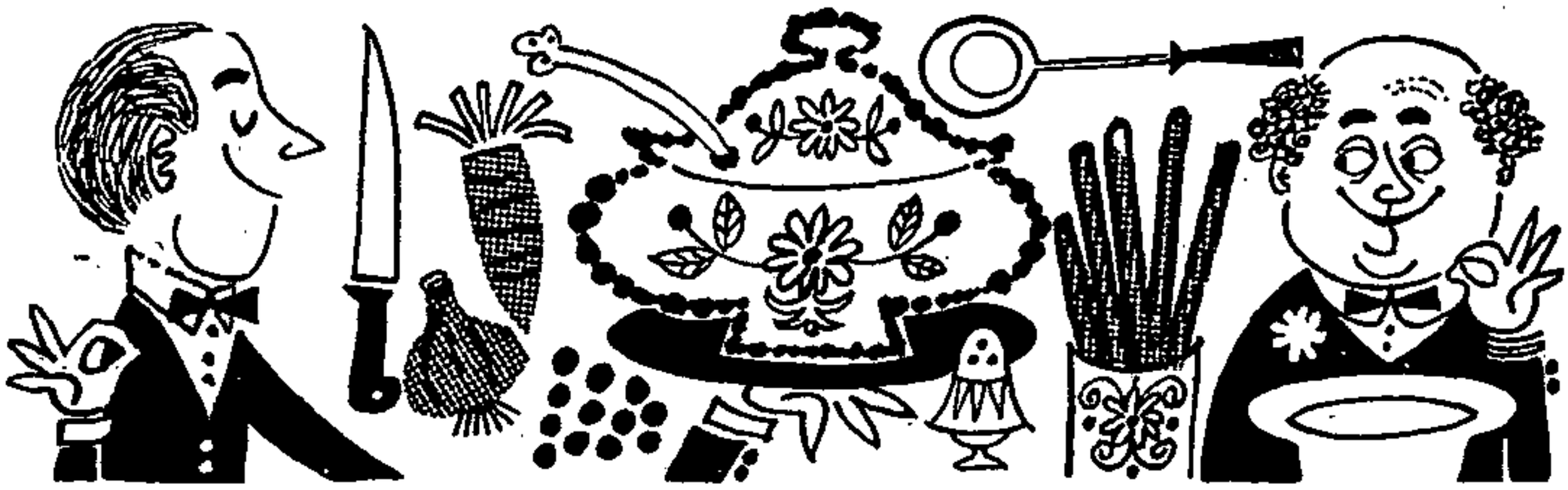
"Ha!" he said. "That looks a good, appetizing soup!"

"What on earth do they see so specially marvellous in that soup?" thought Porthos, looking at the tureenful of thin, watery brew, on which floated here and there a few crusts . . .

Madame Coquenard sat down and signed to the rest of the company to do likewise. She served her husband first, Porthos next, and herself last. Then she distributed the crusts, without any soup, among the three ravenous clerks.

At that moment the dining-room door swung slowly open on its hinges and Porthos, looking out, saw the little errand-boy standing in the passage; having been forbidden to join the feast, he was eating his dry crust steeped in the combined smells from the kitchen and the dining-room.

ALEXANDRE DUMAS, *The Three Musketeers*



Broth of a Broth

O, Brandy Broth is the King of Broth and royal in the rooms of the mouth. A good chicken and a noble piece of ham, with a little shoulder of lamb, small to have the least of grease, and then a paste of the roes of trout with cream, a bit of butter, and the yolk of egg, whipped tight and poured in when the chicken, proud with a stuffing of sage and thyme, has been elbowing the lamb and the ham in the earthenware pot until all three are tender as the heart of a mother. In with the carrots and turnips and the goodness of marrow bones, and in with a mixing of milk and potatoes. Now watch the clock and every fifteen minutes pour in a noggin of brandy, and with the first a pint of home-brewed ale. Two noggins in, and with the third, throw in the chopped bottoms of leeks, but save the green leaves until ten minutes from the time you sit to eat, for then you shall find them still a lovely green.

RICHARD LLEWELLYN, *How Green Was My Valley*

A Bit Thick

Augustus was a chubby lad;
Fat ruddy cheeks Augustus had:
And everybody saw with joy
The plump and hearty, healthy boy.
He ate and drank as he was told,
And never let his soup get cold.
But one day, one cold winter's day,
He screamed out " Take the soup away!
O take the nasty soup away!
I won't have any soup today."

Next day, now look, the picture shows
How lank and lean Augustus grows!
Yet, though he feels so weak and ill,
The naughty fellow cries out still
" Not any soup for me, I say:
O take the nasty soup away!
I won't have any soup today."

. . . Look at him, now the fourth day's come!
He scarcely weighs a sugar-plum;
He's like a little bit of thread,
And, on the fifth day, he was—dead!

Struwwelpeter, or, Merry Stories and Funny Pictures

NIGHT STOP

"Look, old boy," he said rapidly,
"we've collected a spot of bother."

BY DAPHNE BALLARD

THEY had been flying over the desert since dawn, and now the hands of the flight-deck clock were nearing half past nine. The passengers were fagged and edgy after the strain of departure from England and the sleepless night. They slumped this way and that in their seats, unrevived by the breakfast of sausage and eggs that had been served to them under the white-hot equatorial sky. The smell of it hung about still, a miasma clinging to curtains and upholstery.

Ryan, the co-pilot, came out of the flight-deck and walked the length of the plane in his shirtsleeves, surveying the double line of listless figures out of bloodshot eyes.

The only ones with any spark left were the six months' old baby, bolt upright and wide-eyed in its carry-cot, and Mrs. de Vries, the incredible old ramrod of a woman in seat 25.

The baby knew him by now and threshed its arms at him in a wildly joyous welcome as he came level with its cot. Ryan reached over to catch at a small flailing hand.

"It's all very well for you," he said softly, so as not to wake the mother, "you're the only one who's had a decent night's sleep."

The youngest passenger flashed him a conspiratorial smile and closed a tiny fist round his finger with a grip like a sea anemone's. The old woman in seat 25 seized her opportunity and reached across the aisle to pluck at his sleeve.

Ryan groaned inwardly. What was it now? She was a glutton for awkward questions. What was the length of the Rhône (this as they had flown over it yesterday afternoon) the population of Paris, the height of St. Peter's? He had been tired of it by the time they were over the black velvet length of Italy with the diamond embroidery of its villages streaming out below. What was the chief export of Sicily?

He had been tempted to answer flippantly, "Gangsters—to Chicago." But he had counted ten and launched instead into talk of olives and of wines.

He turned politely to her now, his finger still imprisoned in the baby's grasp.

"Can you tell me, Captain, exactly when we get to Khartoum?"

Her oddly young blue eyes twinkled up at him through their fans of wrinkles. She looked more rested, infinitely more alert than any traveller half her age, he thought with grudging admiration, unremitting old nuisance though she was. Well, this time at least he knew the answer. Everyone in earshot waited for it, craning forward to hear.

"It shouldn't be long now," he said, his round unshaven face creasing into a smile to hearten them. "We ought to land about ten-thirty—in just over an hour."

An hour! Over an hour. It was too long to matter, one way or the other. Time still stretched ahead into infinity, merging into space. Heads lolled back on to the white linen antimacassars, eyelids drooped again over aching eyes. Only the old lady turned her interested gaze to the window, past the hot silver metal of the machine to the miles of scorching sand, stretched like gold moiré silk below.

Ryan went to the flight-deck and closed the door behind him. "The customers have just about had it," he said. "They can't wait to offload at Khartoum. Thank Pete we're nearly there."

Jacko Shield's face, lean, brown, and imperturbable, glanced up at him briefly from the controls. "What's their case?" he inquired, mildly nettled. "All they've got to do is sit. What about me?"

"You? Don't make me laugh. You know you're never tired as long as you're airborne."

It was true. They had been together on ten of these charter flights from Gatwick to Lourenço Marques, and Ryan had never seen his skipper even faintly rattled or worn. The skies were Jacko's natural habitat and planes his single-minded passion. As long as he was at the controls he was content, relaxed, unflagging; and for the greater part of the journey, that was where he was. The passengers as people, as distinct from a load to be safely delivered at the other end, concerned him not at all.

"All that PRO stuff's more in your line than mine, old boy," he would insist. "Besides, they like your reassuring bedside manner."

Whether they liked it or not, it was what they got. If the passengers saw Jacko at all, they saw him briefly and by accident —as he strode across the tarmac at the airports or slipped out of the flight-deck to stretch his legs and light a cigarette. Most

of them thought that he was some sort of backroom boy, and that it was Ryan who was in charge. Well, it suited them both, now that they had settled down into a routine of their own making.

"Isn't it about time you gave the customers another of your travel talks?" Jacko suggested now. "Might pep them up a bit."

"I doubt it," said Ryan, but he reached obligingly for the charter company's pad with its neat over-simplified map of Africa and began to fill in the details of height and cruising speed.

When he had finished it, he stepped out through the flight-deck door and handed his bulletin to the passengers. The school of dogged poker players in front passed it over their heads, without reading it, to the couple behind.

They and most of the others were too tired to take in anything but the time of arrival, now drawing blessedly near, and the fact that they were to spend seventeen hours in Khartoum. But Mrs. de Vries got out her little red leather notebook and made painstaking notes about the source of the Nile and the Sudanese cotton crop.

It was just before they were due to touch down that she came to him with a request for her big suitcase.

"But, madam," he protested, "it's packed away in the hold. We can't get at it now. You had your instructions about an overnight bag, didn't you? You ought to have everything you need in that."

Her face puckered with dismay.

"They did ask me at the airport—" she began.

He hardened his heart. Darn it, he was tired too.

"You ought to have been told, not asked," he said shortly. "The instructions are quite clear—no access to heavy luggage on the trip."

To his horror her eyes swam with sudden tears. It was the first sign of weakness she had shown on the whole exhausting journey.

"Then I shan't be able to sleep," she said despairingly. "My hot water bottle and my sleeping-pills—they're both in the suitcase, and I can never sleep without them. I didn't have a wink all last night. I shall be ill—really ill."

Tears, as always, were more than he could stand.

"O.K., O.K.," he said hastily, "we'll see what we can do. You can forget about your hot water bottle, though—the temperature is likely to be 110 in the shade—but if you must have your sleeping-pills . . ."

He had been right about the heat, he found when they landed. To make matters worse, it was the fast of Ramadan, and the

Sudanese had not eaten for a week. They looked sour when he asked for help in unloading the heavy luggage. There was nothing for it but to do the job himself. He pulled the heavy cases out while the hot metal of the plane intensified the scorch of the sun, and the sweat was pouring off him in rivers long before he came to the blue leather case with her name on it.

Then there was all the stuff to pile back again. He was more than ready for the lukewarm drink that Jacko had waiting for him in the customs building.

Coming back to Khartoum was like coming home.

From the first he had liked this good-tempered city where sandalled feet had hammered the desert sand into firmness along the banks of the Nile. After their regular overnight stops, he had come to be regarded as an habitué at the hotel, and there was a smiling welcome from the desk clerk, porters, and the scarlet-sashed, white-robed Abdul who had constituted himself Ryan's unofficial batman.

"Same room, sah." Abdul led the way along the wide dark passages, his sandals slapping rhythmically ahead. "Anything you be wanting now?"

"Only a bath." Ryan sighed with relief as he stepped into the punkah-cooled air of the clean bedroom and spun his cap on to a chair. "And a gin and tonic when the bar opens."

Abdul brought it in a king-sized glass, served on jagged rocks of ice, just as Ryan had stretched himself out on the wide sheeted bed after his bath. Outside in the blinding midday sun a laundryman sang nasally to himself as he pegged up the hotel washing. A bluebottle buzzed idly at the shuttered window.

He hadn't meant to sleep till after lunch, but suddenly it seemed the only possible thing to do . . .

When he woke the sun was setting, and in the garden behind the bougainvillaea hedge the hotel servants were prostrating themselves in prayer to Allah. He dressed and wandered out on to the wide patio in front, festive now with its strings of co'oured lights. Beyond it the Nile silvered in the dusk, and a lighted boat left a shivering platinum wake as it ferried a load of workers home to the opposite bank.

He bought an evening paper from the fezzed vendor on the steps and looked round for somewhere to sit.

The tables were filling up now with townspeople as well as the hotel guests. He hesitated, and was lost.

"Won't you join me, Captain?"

Ryan winced as he recognised the quavering voice of old Mrs. de Vries behind him. It would have been nice to have been

alone a bit. But he could hardly refuse. After all, he had hammered the old girl rather over the matter of her suitcase this morning.

With the practised smile of the Public Relations man, he pulled out a chair and sat down opposite her.

"Well," he said, "feeling rested?"

"Completely," she said contentedly. "I had a bit of a lie down and then I went to see the gum factory and the zoological gardens. Did you know that Khartoum had a gum factory?"

He shook his head. Really, the old girl was steel and whipcord. And entirely insatiable in her thirst for knowledge.

"Is there anything else one ought to see here?" she was asking.

"The cathedral," he suggested, trying to be helpful. "And there's a better cabaret show here as a rule than you'll find in London."

She was entranced and hounded him for details. What were the performers? Sudanese, Egyptian, Ethiopian, what?

"Russians, last time I was here, and French," he told her.

She rooted round in her crocodile leather handbag for the red notebook and a pencil.

"Russians! Now really!" she exulted, marvelling at this pearl of new knowledge.

Her old face sparkled with interest; rainbow reflections from the fairy lights winked from the diamonds in her ears and the rings on her arthritic old hands. She must have been quite a stunner fifty years ago, Ryan decided, watching her.

By the time she left him to go in to dinner he knew the names of her grandchildren in Holland—she had been on a visit to her son in Amsterdam, she told him—and had examined their smudgy snapshots from the wallet in her handbag. He knew the acreage and the yield of her orange farm in the Transvaal Lowveld, and the history of the native families who had worked for her for three generations.

In exchange he found himself answering her questionnaire about his home, his family, his job, his opinion of Russia's spaceman, Britain's coloured immigrants, America's young president. She collected facts with the same fascinated absorption that another woman might give to seashells or old china. He was surprised to find himself genuinely regretful when she stood up at last to go.

"I wonder," she hesitated, as she picked up her vast handbag. "I have a guest coming after dinner . . . Would you perhaps be kind enough to escort us to the cabaret? I would like to have a look at these Russians."

" It would be a pleasure," he bowed, and meant it.

As soon as he saw Jacko heading for his table with the plain-clothes man, he knew there was going to be trouble.

On the face of it, it was absurd to feel any foreboding at all. He knew Major Coetzee, a genial Afrikaans police officer. They had met a few flights back, at Lourenço Marques, where the Major had been holidaying at the Polana Hotel with his wife and pretty daughter.

The reasonable reaction at seeing him here, in the middle of the desert and thousands of miles from their last meeting place, ought surely to be plain surprise, not this groundless dread. So Ryan tried to tell himself. But he could not keep the apprehension out of his voice as he rose and held out his hand.

" What brings you here, of all places? " He knew he sounded suspicious.

" A Dakota, ou kêrel, and am I glad to get out of it for a while! " The Major wrung his hand and settled his huge form in a bamboo chair that creaked in agonised protest. " We ought to have been here before you—I had planned to meet you at the airport. But there was a little engine trouble and we were held up at Dar-es-Salaam."

Jacko beckoned to a turbanned waiter and gave their order. Then he leaned across the table, an unaccustomed frown corrugating his brow.

" Look, old boy," he spoke rapidly to Ryan in a low monotone, " we seem to have collected a spot of bother. Perhaps the Major had better tell you about it himself."

Coetzee was lighting his pipe. Slowly he shook the flame from the match and snapped it in two between his fingers.

" It is my unpleasant duty," he said, looking Ryan squarely in the eyes as he threw the pieces in the ashtray, " to relieve you of one of your passengers."

Ryan ran his mind's eye along the plane's rows of seats, recalling one face after another.

" Which one? What for? " he demanded hostilely.

Coetzee took a folded passenger list from an inside pocket and consulted it.

" Mrs. Dolly de Vries, for diamond smuggling," he said.

Ryan threw back his head and laughed in his relief. It was arrant nonsense, of course.

" Have you met her? " he asked. " The thing's absurd."

" I don't think it is, my friend." The Major reached into his pocket again. " I had a warrant to search her room. I did so this afternoon while the good lady was out sightseeing. This is what I found."

He placed a smallish glass bottle on the table between them. Ryan looked curiously at its label.

"Sleeping-pills. What's wrong with that?" he challenged.

"Take a closer look." Coetzee twisted the bottle between his brown fingers so that it caught the light. "Blue-white diamonds. Beauties. Mined in South Africa. Cut in Amsterdam."

There was a cast-iron case against her, the policeman insisted.

"She and her sons have been at it for years. We've suspected it, but only lately have we found proof. The younger son farms with her near White River—he was the go-between, taking the stones from the alluvial diggings on their farm to the older brother who lives in Holland. They have them cut in Amsterdam, then fly them back to South Africa.

"We can't arrest her until she is back on South African territory, but my instructions are to take her into custody here."

"What for?" Ryan wanted to know. "She couldn't do any damage here, right out in the desert. Anyway, there isn't time. We're off again at dawn."

"There's time all right, and she'll use it. It seems that the son has always offloaded half the stones on to an agent here who sails them down the Nile to sell at fancy prices in Cairo. That's why I've been sent here—to catch her redhanded if I can. Unless I'm much mistaken, she'll be meeting him here tonight."

Ryan remembered now—the guest he'd promised to escort to the cabaret show. Oh well . . .

"I suppose it can all be done more or less painlessly," he said unhappily. "I mean, you won't handcuff her or anything?"

The Major smiled. "Not unless she makes things difficult. If she comes quietly, no one need even know about it. But I felt I had to put you two gentlemen in the picture."

From the moment that the old lady stepped out again on to the patio, it all went with the smoothness of a well-directed film, and Ryan hated it from first to last.

She stood for a moment framed in the pillared archway, one hand clutching the big handbag like a child to her thin bosom, the other leaning on an ivory-handled cane. Her eyes raked the guests, and then at a signal from an olive-skinned overweight man in the corner, she made her way to his table, the walking-stick tapping out her progress on the tiles. There was the exchange of pleasantries, of bows and smiles, the signalling to a waiter for coffee.

"It all seems much too easy," objected Ryan, shifting in his seat. "I suppose this really is the dealer bloke she's with?"

"No doubt of it at all, I should think," murmured Coetzee.

"There's not much time left, and she hasn't seen him earlier today—I've checked on all her movements. If she wants to deliver the goods and collect the cash, now is the time."

As if he had given her the cue, Mrs. de Vries snapped open her bag and drew a bottle from its yawning depths. There was a flash from its glass surface as she handed it to the man across the table.

"Ah-ah—sleeping-pills again!" said the Major. "This is where I come in. Cheerio, chaps."

He creaked hugely to his feet and moved between the tables with his rugby forward's roll. They saw him introduce himself, one powerful hand on the back of her chair.

"I can't stand any more of this," Ryan said furiously, taking a pull at his drink. "It's like watching a butterfly on a pin."

"Don't look then," advised Jacko. This was the bit of the film to close your eyes against if you found it distasteful. It was as simple as that. "She's taking it very quietly, anyway," Jacko reported.

"She would." Ryan said it almost with pride. "What about the Egyptian? Why doesn't Coetzee climb into him?"

"He's done nothing he shouldn't," Jacko pointed out. "It's no crime to buy cut stones. Even if there were any irregularity, it would be the responsibility of the Sudanese police. South Africa can't touch him."

He lowered his voice. "It's all over now. Coetzee's taking her away."

Ryan looked up to see the old lady, upright, indomitable as ever, tapping her way back to the hotel doorway, with Coetzee like a great protective son in her wake. No one took the slightest notice. Well, why should they?

Ryan found he had been holding his breath for he knew not what noisy protestation. He let it go in a slow sigh, unclenching his fists.

It was just then, as she got to the verandah steps, that she turned and looked back in their direction. She spoke briefly to the policeman, who nodded, and then she was tacking across to where they sat.

"Good grief!" groaned Jacko, panicking quietly. "She's coming over to us. How do you take your leave of a diamond smuggler? What do we say?"

He need not have worried. Dolly de Vries held out her jewelled hand with a smile of infinite composure as they rose to meet her.

"I wanted to thank you both," she said warmly. "It has been a wonderful journey, and you have made me very comfortable. I

shall write to the charter company when I get back, and tell them so."

She took Ryan's hand in hers, and he felt her rings cutting into his fingers. Still clasping his hand, she turned to Coetzee, looming enormously at her shoulder.

"Perhaps the Major has told you? For some absurd reason he would like me to travel the rest of the way in his plane. So this must be good-bye."

She turned then to Jacko, her hand extended like a queen's. It was while Jacko was bowing over it, murmuring something about a pleasant journey, that Ryan became aware of the hard object in his hand. He uncurled his fingers and glanced down.

Winking up at him from his palm, where she had pressed it lingeringly into the flesh, was a blue-white diamond, prismatic and dazzling in the night lights of Khartoum.

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THE OTHER SEX

The Spaniards have it that a buxom widow must be either *married, buried, or shut up in a convent.*

THOMAS CHANDLER HALIBURTON

Between a woman's "yes" and "no" I would not venture to stick a pin.

MIGUEL DE CERVANTES

Brigands demand your money or your life; women require both.

SAMUEL BUTLER

Marry one woman and you get six.

DON HEROLD

Marriage is popular because it combines the maximum of temptation with the maximum of opportunity.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

One can find women who have never had one love affair, but it is rare indeed to find any who have had *only* one.

LA ROCHEFOUCAULD

Women are not much—but they are the best other sex we have.

DON HEROLD

"She's a lively one, is Lady Mary," said Rachel. "She ain't no softie—'ad 'er baby in a old shed and shoved 'im in a feeding trough to keep 'im warm. She don't look all dreamy and soppy. She 'ad to live rough, same as us."

A gipsy's-eye view of the Nativity, seen with a child's clarity of vision, warm, uncluttered, infinitely practical. Our Christmas story with a difference . . .

A Basket of Stars

By MARGARET DREW

THREE gipsy children came to the Convent of Our Lady Queen of Heaven one dismal Sunday in November. The wind blew off the high shoulders of the downs from the north-east, scattering sleet from the low-hung grey clouds, flattening the young hazels in the hedges, buffeting the flocks of greedy starlings—as lean and hungry as the children themselves—and, like them, in certain lights flamboyant and fearless.

As they approached the convent, the gipsies' loping strides slowed down to an uncertain shamble. The wind and the weather were nothing to them, and they feared no man—farmer, policeman, or schoolmaster—but once inside the convent gates they were on strange ground. Who knew what went on inside those old grey walls where the Sisters, habited like magpies in black-and-white, lived their mysterious lives?

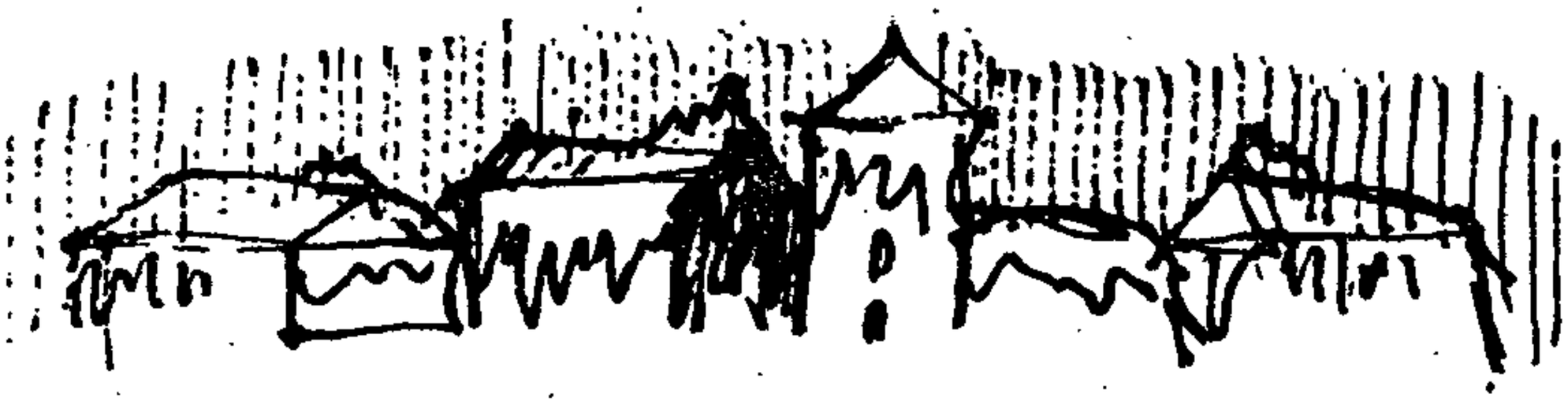
"Let's get out of it," whispered Jasper, the eldest. "I don't like the smell of it—too much like gaol."

"We're going in," said Rachel. "That ain't no prison; it's a house—a big old house where the nuns live. They got grub. For us."

Little Sara burst into a long despairing wail. "I be hungry," she sobbed.

"There, there, my darling," soothed Rachel. "We'll soon have our bellies full. Hush, now."

"I ain't goin' in," Jasper persisted. They were near the door of the convent school now. "I can smell it—same like the nick. I ponged it when Mam took me in to see our old man."



" Look," said Rachel. She pointed to the niche above the great front door. Standing in it was the statue of a beautiful lady, her feet set on the crescent moon, her head crowned with stars. " That's her," she said. " That's Lady Mary."

" What yer mean, Lady Mary?" said Jasper scornfully. " That ain't no lady—that's a image."

" Course it is; a image of Lady Mary."

" Ladies don't trouble about gippos," said Jasper. " She'll set the dogs on us. Let's scarper."

" No." Rachel was determined. " Lady Mary'll look out to us. Our mam said so."

" Don't be so bloomin' daft—" Jasper began, but he was interrupted by the opening of the door. A black-and-white Sister stood there, cold and remote in the grey afternoon light.

" Well," she said, " what do you want here? If you've come to beg—"

" No, my kind lady." Automatically, Rachel dropped into the whine of the mumping gipsy. " We wants rest and a bit of grub."

" This is no place for gipsies," said the Sister, with a snap of the mouth. " Go round to the back door. Maybe Sister-in-the-Kitchen will have something for you." She turned and went inside, closing the door sharply. Everything about Sister Margaret was sharp.

" See? " said Jasper. "Told you they wouldn't give us nothin'."

" Come round the back." Rachel was halfway there already, followed by the tagging Sara.

So the three ragged figures crept round to the kitchen door and knocked. This time the door was opened by a round, pale-faced, bespectacled, beaming Sister. She wore an apron over her habit, and it gave her a homely look that was continued in her eyes.

" My goodness gracious! " she exclaimed. " Three gipsy children with not a coat between them on a day like this." She swept them all into the warm kitchen, sat them down with a glass of milk each, and supplied them with doorsteps of bread and butter. " Now," she said, as the food disappeared down ravenous young throats, " what have you come to beg? "

"We ain't begging," said Rachel, and this time her voice contained nothing of the whining note. "We wants help."

"Oh," said Sister-in-the-Kitchen, busy with pots and pans. "And what sort of help do you want?"

"Only a bit," Rachel answered. "Our mam's dead, and we ain't got nobody to see to us."

"Where's your father, then?"

"In clink, in prison. 'E 'it a bloke."

"I see. And how long ago did your mother die?"

"Las' night. Up there." Rachel jerked her head in the direction of the downs. "See, we didn't want to stay there—"

She never finished her sentence, for Sister Patrick had put down her saucepan with a clatter and was embracing them one after another, to Jasper's disgust. He had let Rachel take charge because he knew that people were more inclined to respond to an appeal from a girl than from a boy; but he, Jasper, was almost a man. He edged towards the door.

"You poor little souls!" exclaimed Sister Patrick. "To go through all that alone."

Sara, overwhelmed by the warmth and kindness, burst into tears; and when, ten minutes later, Sister Gabriel came into the kitchen to see what had happened to make tea so late, she found Sister Patrick with Sara on her lap, her arm round Rachel, and Jasper vanishing through the back door. By the time she had taken in the facts, he was gone—out and away into the countryside that was his home.

With their usual efficiency, the Sisters dealt with the situation, arranging for the funeral of the gipsy mother and taking the two girls into their care until other arrangements could be made. "Though what other arrangements *will* be made, I don't know," said Sister Margaret. "I suppose the Local Authorities are responsible for them. We can scarcely take them in with our boarders."

But Reverend Mother thought otherwise. She sent for Rachel.

"My child," she said, "do you know what this is?" She held up a little silver cross and chain.

"Yes—" Rachel's voice shook—"Mam had it round her neck. You took it; you stole it."

"No, my child, I kept it for you. You must wear it now. But you have not answered my question. What is it?"

"It's a cross," said Rachel, puzzled.

"And did your mother tell you anything about the cross?"

Rachel's face was puckered with intense concentration. "Yes," she said finally, and in a rush of words remembered parrot-wise, "the-cross-where-Our-Saviour-died-for-us."

Reverend Mother smiled. "Quite right," she said. "Do you remember any more?"

"Our Father . . . in Heaven . . ." But the rest was jumbled and lost.

"Well—" Reverend Mother looked the soul of patience—"it's not very much, but it is something. How old are you, Rachel?"

"I ain't sure, my lady; I think I may be twelve or thirteen."

"Very well. You must call me Reverend Mother, not my lady."

"And Mam told me—she told me—" Rachel's eyes were bright with a swift remembrance—"she told me about Lady Mary over the door, with the stars all round her head. Mam said Lady Mary would look out to us kids, and she said, 'Holy Mary, pray for us.'"

"Well, Rachel, Our Lady will look after you. You are to stay here in the convent with us—you and your little sister—and you will learn a great deal more about Our Lady and about the cross. You must try hard to be good, and learn all that the Sisters can teach you."

"Yes, my— I mean, Reverend Mother."

Reverend Mother rose and hung the little silver crucifix on its thin chain round Rachel's neck. "I hope you will be happy with us, my child. You must take care of your sister and see that she is a good girl. You will have lessons with the other girls, and in your free time you can help Sister Patrick in the kitchen. At night you and Sara will share a room together. Is there anything you wish to ask me?"

"Only about our Jasper."

"Ah yes, of course. We can find no trace of him, I am afraid, my child. He is older than you?"

"Oh ah; a couple of years older."

"I see. Well then, Rachel, if there is nothing else you wish to ask me . . ."

Rachel made her way back to Sara. Both were now dressed in dead black, complete with long black woollen stockings and heavy laced shoes. Both had been bathed, scrubbed, and decontaminated to the point of exhaustion, and both were extremely uncomfortable. In their four-day sojourn at the convent, they had learnt the unwisdom of questioning the ways of the terrible Sisters who commanded and drove them—with the best of intentions—all day. They had learnt to say, "Yes, Sister," and "No, Sister," with the correct downward droop of the eyelids and flat intonation. They were mimics by nature.

"What she say?" demanded Sara on Rachel's return.

"Got to bide here. Go to school. 'Elp in their kitchen. Go to church."

"Wear this muck?" Sara kicked her hated shoes against each other.

"Course. It's warm, ain't it?"

"'Ave them baths?"

"S'pose so. 'Tain't for ever."

"'Ow long for?"

"Oh—till spring maybe. Then we'll take the road. Jasper'll come for us."

"Want to go now."

"Can't. Grub's good 'ere. We'll put up with the rest."

"'Ow long'll they put up with *us*?"

That was a question that the Sisters asked themselves more than once in the weeks that followed. In spite of constant and hated bathing, brushing, and combing, the gipsy children were seldom clean for long, and never at any time were they tidy. The black serge dresses soon looked like old penwipers, in spite of Sister Margaret's strictness. The stockings developed holes that could never be overtaken by compulsory darning. With hair like doormats, and permanently grubby hands, they sat in class in a desk by themselves. The twenty or so other pupils sent them to Coventry after the first two days.

"Could you not try to be a little more kind to our unfortunate gipsy children, Madeleine?" Sister Gabriel spoke gently.

"If you wish it, Sister."

"No, my child; not because I wish it, but because it would be a charitable act."

"But, Sister, they're so impossible."

Sister Gabriel sighed. She wondered why Reverend Mother had decided to keep them—it was very hard on everybody. And then she remembered her vow of obedience, and did penance for the question. Yet she felt sorry for the poor things—to lose their mother so early. What could one do, but pray?

"Remember what they are, Madeleine. Can't you think of one thing in their favour, my child?"

"Well, yes, Sister, I can."

"Well?"

"Every evening, quite on their own, they go into the chapel and pray before the statue of Our Lady."

"Do they? I didn't know of it."

"It's quite true, Sister; we've all seen them."

"Thank you, my child. Surely their devotion must make up for some of their faults . . ."

Rachel and Sara had no interest whatever in the other girls. They remained aloof, speaking to nobody but each other. In their eyes, the pupils of the school were soft: helpless, without craft or cunning, and flatfooted.

At the end of term, Rachel and Sara were left alone with the Sisters in the convent that suddenly seemed much too big. The Sisters, now that they had a little spare time on their hands, began their preparations for Christmas. Sara was in great demand for winding wool and running errands; Rachel spent most of her time with Sister Patrick in the kitchen.

Sister Patrick was a wise and practical woman. She knew that in class Rachel seemed dull and apathetic, learning what was driven into her and no more, but in the warmth of the kitchen she came to life. Her questions were endless, especially upon religious matters, and Sister Patrick took every opportunity of instructing her. The Christmas story fascinated Rachel.

"Mean to tell me they *walked* to Bethlehem?" she said.

"Yes, child." Sister Patrick was chopping suet. "Our Lord was born in a lowly stable of humble parents, to teach us the virtue of humility. They had to walk everywhere then: no buses or trains. Not even proper shoes."

"Same as us," breathed Rachel. "Travellers, same as us."

Later she told Sara the story. ". . . and he was bornded in a old shed with the cattle. And Lady Mary never had no clothes nor nothing for him—didn't have time to beg none, I s'pose—so she wrapped him up in a lot of ole rags, and shoved him in the feeding-trough where the hay was."

"Warm," said Sara approvingly.

"Ah, she weren't no gorgio woman—not Lady Mary. She knew how to get along as well as any of us. And then a lot of shepherds come in to see Lady Mary and the baby. And a bit after that they say three kings come."

"Kings?"

"Ah; in gold crowns."

"Get on!"

"I reckon that's a bit thick meself, but Sister Patrick said so."

"It's clean daft. Kings don't never come to see us travellers. How'd they know the way, anyhow?"

"Supposed to be a star in the sky showed 'em. I reckon Lady Mary laid her pateran, though."

Sara yawned. "Course she did. Wonder what it was? 'Twasn't grass like our Jasper's, I don't reckon."

"No, nothing like; not ole handfuls of grass twisted. Flowers, maybe."

"Or stars." Sara was very nearly asleep.

"Don't be soft," said Rachel automatically. Yet, why not? she thought, as she fell asleep. Why shouldn't Lady Mary, that great and marvellous traveller, mark her comings and goings with the stars of heaven?

The high and solemn festival of Christmas was celebrated in the convent; and at Midnight Mass, Rachel, kneeling with her eyes on the crib, felt a kinship with the Christ Child, that son of wandering parents, in the old stable. Lady Mary she reverenced as a preternaturally sharp-witted gipsy, and Father Joseph fitted her picture of family life—vague and in the background, as fathers were . . .

Suddenly she realised that the Sisters had got the whole thing wrong. Their Mother Mary was a painted statue, not the splendid, tough, and lively Lady Mary, keeping the Holy Family together through her own hard endeavour. Lady Mary didn't belong here in this rule-ridden, closed house. She and her Son belonged to the free people on the open downs.

From that time, the gipsy children ceased to pray before the chapel statue. The crib was their place of pilgrimage many times a day, where they went to console the Christ Child, kept, as they were, under lock and key.

The good Sisters saw, and smiled and nodded. Their work was bearing fruit, they thought. Rachel was becoming more docile and, of course, little Sara copied her. Only Sister Patrick became rather worried. She knew that somehow Rachel had changed, but she couldn't put her finger on anything definite so she held her peace.

Outwardly, Rachel said, "Yes, Sister," and "No, Sister," and even darned her stockings without grumbling. Inwardly, she raged. Them Sisters, like all house-folk, knew nothing. Keeping three free travellers—Mary, Joseph, and the Child—shut up in their old house. Turning Lady Mary into a painted statue. What did they know?

True, the grub in the convent was good, and there was warmth and shelter and even clothes. Before Christmas she had considered the possibility of staying there more or less for good.

But was it worth it? Jasper had been right: the place was a prison. Jasper would be back for them in the spring and then they'd take and go.

And never come back, she vowed.

The spring term began, and after the Feast of the Epiphany the crib was put away. Rachel found out from Sister Patrick where they had put it: in the big cupboard where the vases and

cleaning materials were kept. And suddenly Rachel and Sara became extremely virtuous and hardworking.

"What are you after?" said Sister Patrick one day as they cleaned saucepans.

"Dunno what you mean," said Rachel.

"You may as well tell me. I might be able to get it for you."

"'Tain't nothin'."

"'Tis." Sister Patrick laughed. "All this sudden tidiness and industry isn't for nothing. Bless you, child," she went on, "when I was a girl I lived at the Big House on the edge of a forest, and I spent half my holidays with the gipsies. I know just a little bit about you travellers."

"Huh! Forest folk!" Rachel sniffed. "Didekeis, they be. We be free travellers from here to Wales."

"But your mother—she wasn't a Welsh gipsy?"

"Not she. Come from somewhere foreign. 'Ad to learn English, and then she couldn't talk it good. We—she and he and us—we rokkered Rom mostly."

"I knew a word or two of Romany when I was young," said Sister Patrick, "but what is it that you want?"

"Well, me and Sara wants to clean the brass in the chapel."

"So that you can go to the cupboard where the crib figures are kept."

"Ger! You knows too much." Rachel was bitter. "I shouldn't never have let on."

"Now, that's where you're wrong," said Sister Patrick. "I'll speak to Reverend Mother for you. Sister Francis who does the work at present could do with a bit of help. But," she continued—and the Irish in her voice was very strong—"if you so much as lay one finger on the holy figures, I'll skin you both, you and your sister."

So it came about that the chapel brass was cleaned—and re-cleaned after inspection by Sister Patrick—by the two gipsy girls. They were very careful to keep their hands away from the Christ Child, but Rachel would look up to the shelf where he lay, smiling his enigmatic smile, and whisper, "Don't you cry, my little sweet Jesus; they ain't going to shut yer in for ever."

In March the weather improved enough for the school, with two attendant nuns, to take their carefully conducted walks over the downs. The gipsy children were allowed to go on these expeditions. Their feet, encased in stout, laced shoes, felt unlike their own as they trod upon their native heath. They were not permitted to run about; they had to keep two and two in the crocodile. This Sara found almost unendurable.

"When can we go?" she asked again and again. "Ain't it spring yet?"

"Nigh on," said Rachel, comforting her. "Wait, my lovey, until we see our Jasper's pateran."

They looked about them with their keen gipsy eyes on the hated walks, searching for the trail of twisted handfuls of grass, the pateran that would tell them that their brother had returned. But he was long in coming.

Instead, the convent was thrown into a bustle by the arrival of the Bishop. He came, inspected, smiled, and commended—and was told of the gipsy children.

"Excellent, excellent," he approved. "A hard, almost an impossible task," he said to Reverend Mother, "but you are right to attempt it."

Rachel and Sara, at his request, were brought to him, and he interviewed them alone. "My poor children," he said, "you have suffered the loss of your dear mother, and that is very sad, but the good Sisters here are taking care of you. And remember that although your own mother has gone to live in heaven you have the Mother of Our Lord always to love and protect you."

The words were conventional, but something in the tone of the voice and the clearness of the eye showed Rachel that this man was no fool. He might even understand about Lady Mary.

"Ah," she said with conviction, "she'll look out to us all right. Only . . ."

"Yes, my child?"

"You know as well as me that she ain't like what they say she is here."

"I don't understand you, my child. Whatever the Sisters tell you about Our Lady is quite correct, you may be sure of that."

"Oh, 'tain't *they*; 'tis the images."

"Go on, my child."

"Well, that one over the door with the stars, and the one in the chapel with the gold roses—they ain't *her*."

"What makes you say that, Rachel?"

Now the Bishop had been an art student when he was in the world, and one of his interests was the improvement of religious works of art. Wherever he could do so with tact, he replaced mawkish holy images by statues of imagination and craftsmanship. He was all sympathy with this odd little gipsy who seemed to have a fine instinct for such things. But he was glad that Reverend Mother was not present.

"She don't look like that," Rachel went on. "She ain't a softie—well, she couldn't 'a' bin. She had to live rough, same as us; walk everywhere, same as us. Had her baby in a old

shed, shoved 'im in the hay to keep 'im warm—good stuff, hay is!—and never made a bit of fuss. She don't look all dreamy and soppy; she's a lively one, is Lady Mary. And they dresses her all wrong, too."

"Rachel," said the Bishop in a purely secular tone, "if you had to make an image of Our Lady, what would it be like?"

"Garn, I couldn't make no image!" Rachel was hurt.

The Bishop, now almost an art student again, said, "I know you couldn't make one, but just supposing you could . . . She'd have a blue cloak, of course."

"No, she wouldn't." Rachel's voice was scornful. "Her shawl's all patches—green and brown and yaller—like you see the fields from the top of the downs. She've got a blue headshawl, though. And a basket for the stars."

"Stars?"

"Ah, that's her pateran—stars."

"What is a pateran, Rachel?"

"Don't you know nothing? It's a trail you make to show where you bin. Might be leaves or bits of stick or grass. Hers is stars."

The Bishop was silent. His mind was filled as it had not been filled for forty years, with an artist's vision of a gipsy madonna in a patchwork cloak wide enough to embrace the whole world, swinging across heaven, strewing as she went a trail of stars.

Rachel mistook his silence for disapproval. "You can laugh," she said. "Reckon a gorgio *would* laugh. But what do you know about her?"

"Ah, what *do* we know about her?" said the Bishop. "Indeed, I wasn't laughing, Rachel. You've taught me something. Thank you."

"'Sall right," she answered awkwardly. "I knowed you'd see it somehow."

"Yes," said the Bishop, "I see it. But I'm afraid the Sisters won't if you mention it to them."

"Them!" said Rachel. "Huh!"

The Bishop blessed Rachel and the silent and astonished Sara. Then he expressed his approval once more to Reverend Mother and went away, his head full of the patchwork madonna and plans for the education of Rachel. The gipsy-child had imagination—it must not be wasted. He would do something for her, he decided.

But two days later, on the tedious school walk, Rachel and Sara saw at last the twisted bunches of grass they were seeking. Jasper had come for them.

"Today's Wednesday," Rachel whispered to her sister. "Friday's brass cleaning. We'll wait till then and . . ."

"We'll scarper," finished Sara. "And about time, too."

So it was that on the Friday, the Feast of the Annunciation, Sister Francis reported the two gipsies missing. Search parties and the police failed to trace them, and at the end of a hectic day the convent returned to its former quiet.

"Well," said Reverend Mother, "we did our best. Of course, the police may find them yet." But secretly she rather hoped not. It had been a distinct strain.

"Oh, I forgot to lock the cleaning cupboard," said Sister Francis.

"If I were you," said Sister Patrick grimly, "I should make sure that nothing is missing."

In a monastery far away a talented young monk laboured at the beginnings of a statue which nobody liked, except the Bishop who had designed it. It was of a strapping, dark-browed madonna in a patchwork cloak, and on her arm was a basket full of stars.

In the Convent of Our Lady Queen of Heaven, huddling, bleak-roofed, under the hills, the Sisters went about with tightly-closed lips, carefully not speaking of the wicked ingratitude of gipsy vagabonds who took charity and repaid it with theft.

Only Sister Patrick understood a little of the joy of the three gipsy children, dancing barefoot over the downs, singing, and bearing away on high their little Christ Child to poverty and hardship and freedom.

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LEISURE PLEASURE 4

A rhyming quiz—for new addicts, each clue leads to two words, each of two syllables, which rhyme in both their syllables. Some of the clues are slightly contrived, but not unrecognisably so. An example of clue and answer: South American horse—Chile filly. Answers on page 143.

1. *Damp leather*
2. *Satire*
3. *Ho, John Bull!*
4. *Embraces wife*
5. *Captain's kids*
6. *Soprano*
7. *Spoil the goose*
8. *Good digestion*
9. *Recruit's betting agents*
10. *Giddy Elizabeth*
11. *Finishin' the fowl*
12. *Result of too much sun*
13. *Bruise spice*
14. *Spilling fat*
15. *Brief brief*
16. *Bird bullet*
17. *Unsponsored*
18. *Christmas decoration income*
19. *Sews trousers*
20. *Lively table bird*

Characteristic, a detective dry martini, chosen for Argosy by Michael Gilbert from the stories of Cyril Hare—pseudonym of the late Judge Gordon Clark—whose distinguished detective novels include With a Bare Bodkin, and Tragedy at Law.

I NEVER FORGET A FACE

BY CYRIL HARE

I'LL tell you an odd thing about me—I never forget a face. The only trouble is that nine times out of ten I'm hanged if I can fit a name to it.

I know what you're going to say: you suffer from the same thing yourself. Lots of people do to some extent, more people than not, I dare say. But I'm not like that. When I say I never forget a face, I mean it. I can pass a chap in the street one day and recognise him again months after, though we've never so much as spoken to each other. It's a gift.

My wife says sometimes that I ought to be one of those press reporter fellows who hang about at dress shows and film premieres spotting the celebrities. But, as I tell her. I should fall down pretty badly on a job like that if, when I'd spotted my celebrity, I couldn't say which one it was. That's my trouble, as I say—names.

Mind you, this matter of names has landed me in difficulties as it is, from time to time. But with a spot of ingenuity one can usually manage to get by one way or another. In my job, running round the City doing odd bits of business on commission, one has to be pretty fly not to let on that you can't for the life of you remember whether the blighter you're dealing with is called Smith or Moses. I've offended people that way and lost a good contract more than once. But on the whole, I reckon to gain more than I lose by this queer memory of mine.

Many's the time I've gone up to a man in a bar who didn't know me from Adam. I've said, "I think we've met before," and, what's more, I've been able to give him a hint where it was. I can always connect a face with a background, you see.

Well, as I was saying, I can go up to this chap and remind

him of the Candlestick Makers' dinner or the last big match at Highbury or whatever it was that his face puts me in mind of, and ten to one inside five minutes we're talking business. I can always get a line on his name later on. You'd be surprised how many good clients I've made that way, all for the price of a drink and a good memory for faces.

You can guess there's not a man, woman, or child here in Bardfield that I don't know by sight. I've lived in Bardfield ever since the war. What I like about the place is that it's still quite countrified for all it's only forty minutes from Waterloo. It's a nuisance having the village the best part of a mile from the station, the other side of Bardfield Heath but, after all, that keeps us nice and secluded.

There's quite a pleasant crowd who travel up and down to the City from there most days; and I needn't tell you, I don't know the names of above half of them, though we pass the time of day cheerily enough. My wife complains that I don't know the names of our next-door neighbours, and that's true. All the same, when we got into a tangle with the car in Dover last summer I was able to pacify a very angry bobby simply because I recognised him from Bardfield, though it turned out he'd left the place two years before. He'd served behind the counter in the grocery shop, he told me, and I don't do the shopping once in a blue moon. See what I mean?

Well, on this particular evening I'd been kept a bit late at the office and it was quite a scramble to get to Waterloo in time to catch the 7.7. There was quite a crowd in the train at first, but they thinned out at the inner suburbs, and by the time we got to Ellingham—that's two stops before mine—there were only the two of us left in the carriage, myself and this fellow I was telling you about.

He wasn't one of our regulars—they mostly keep directors' hours—but he was a Bardfield man all right. I knew that as soon as I set eyes on him, of course. I'd nodded and smiled to him when I saw him get in at Waterloo naturally and got a nod and smile back, but that didn't take me any further.

The annoying thing was that I couldn't *place* the fellow, if you know what I mean. His face said Bardfield to me, as plain as print, but that was all it did say. I couldn't hang it on to any particular thing in Bardfield—not the golf course, nor the Red Lion, nor any of my usual haunts.

I guessed he must be one of those fellows who've moved in lately to the council houses by the bus-stop, though I couldn't be sure. Some of us oldtimers are inclined to be standoffish with the newcomers, but that's not my way—never has been. What

I always say is, you never know where the next bit of business is going to come from in my line, and you just can't afford to neglect chances.

So when the two of us found ourselves alone in the carriage with room to stretch our legs and be a bit comfortable, I started to talk just as if we were old acquaintances, which in a way we were—on my side, at least. But I can't say I got very much out of him.

He was a well-spoken young chap, I will say that for him, quiet friendly manner, but he didn't open up a bit. I can generally reckon on finding out what a man's line of country is in ten and a half minutes—that's what it takes from Ellingham to Bardfield by train—and know whether he's a contact worth following up or not, but this one beat me. He looked a bit tired and peaky, I remember, as though he'd been overworking lately, and I thought maybe that made his reactions a bit slow.

"D'you generally travel down on this train?" I asked him. That's usually a pretty safe gambit, because either they do or they don't, and nine times out of ten they'll tell you why and what hours they work and what at. It's only human nature.

But he just smiled and shook his head and said, "Not generally," which wasn't much help.

Of course I went on to talk about the train-service in general, comparing this train with that, but still he wasn't to be drawn. He just agreed with all I said, but he didn't seem to have an opinion of his own.

I told him I sometimes went up to the City by road, but that didn't fetch him either. For that matter, I didn't think it would, because you don't expect a fellow living in a council house to run a car, though there are two or three of them who can afford television sets, and why we should be expected to subsidise their rents out of our rates I for one don't know.

Well, to cut a long story short, I had to give him up. I'd told him quite a bit about myself, of course, by way of making things pleasant. I'd even boasted a little about a rather nice little deal I'd pulled off that morning—a perfectly legal transaction, you'll understand, but not the kind that goes through one's firm's books, if you follow me. After all, if one couldn't do ready-money business from time to time we'd all be paying surtax and where should we be then?

I've always found there's nothing like a little bragging to make a fellow open up. Sort of puts him on his mettle, you know. I'm bound to say he seemed interested in a quiet sort of way, but it was no good. He just wouldn't open up about himself. So, as I say, I gave it up and started to read my paper. And bless

me, if the next time I looked at him he hadn't put his head back and gone off sound asleep!

We were just running into the station, and though the train pulled up with a fair jerk it didn't seem to wake him. Well, I'm a kind-hearted soul, and I wasn't going to let a fellow Bardfield man be carried on all the way to Dorbury if I could help it. So I tapped him pretty sharply on the knee.

"Hey, wake up, old chap! We're there!" I said.

He came awake all at once and smiled at me.

"By jove, so we are!" he said, and scrambled out after me.

You know what the weather was like just then. When we came out of the station together it was pitch dark and raining cats and dogs. There was a wind blowing strong enough to knock you over, and it was as cold as charity. Filthy!

Well, what would you have done? The same as me, I bet. I turned round and said to him, "Look here, old man, the bus isn't due for a quarter of an hour. I've my car in the station yard and if you're in one of the council houses, I can run you up there. It's all on my way."

"Thanks very much," he said, and we splashed across the puddles together to where my old bus was standing, and off we went.

"This is awfully kind of you," he said as we started, and that was the last thing he did say until we were halfway across the heath.

Then he suddenly turned round and said, "You can put me down here."

"What, *here*?" I asked him. It seemed crazy, because there wasn't a house within five hundred yards and, as I say, it was raining and blowing like the end of the world. But all the same, I slowed down automatically as anyone would.

The next thing that happened was that something hit me the most tremendous whack on the back of the head. I pitched forward over the steering-wheel and then everything went black. I can vaguely remember being tumbled out of the car, and when I came to I was lying in the ditch with the rain pouring down on me, with a splitting head, no car in sight, and my pockets—as I found out later—as empty as a bank on Boxing Day.

I pulled myself up eventually and somehow managed to foot it into Bardfield. I made for the police station straight away, of course. It's the first building you come to from that side, anyway. So here I am, Sergeant, come to report the theft of a Riley 14 car, a new umbrella, a gold watch, and a wallet containing a hundred and fifty-two pound ten in notes.

Of course, the minute I got here I remembered who the blighter was. You've got his picture up outside now. I've seen it every day for the last week. That's why his face said Bardfield to me. "Wanted for Robbery with Violence and Attempted Murder—John——" Dash it! I've forgotten the name again. I just can't keep names in my head. But that's the man, Sergeant, you can bet your bottom dollar on that. I tell you—I never forget a face.

SKILLIGOLEE

Imagine your favourite antique shop or market stall stocked with words—an infinite variety of English words to enjoy. Browse round among them in John Moore's company in his new book: we give two of his choices below. (Skilligolee is sailor's soup!)

UMBER—our colours are from Italy. . . named after the brown earths of Siena and Umbria. How beautifully "umber" goes in English poetry,—in *Henry V*, when on the night before Agincourt each side catches sight of "the other's umber'd face" by the light of the camp-fires; or in these lines from *A Shropshire Lad:*

Wenlock Edge was umbered,
And bright was Abdon Burf,
And warm between them slumbered
The smooth green miles of turf. . .

BIKINI—is an atoll in the Marshall Islands; and here, soon after the war, the Americans let off some atomic bombs. I suppose the new fashion in exiguous bathing-wear appeared in the shops on Fifth Avenue about the same time as the island came into the news; and perhaps people forgot the black mushroom of smoke, and thought only of the palm-topped atoll, the blue Pacific, maidens basking on the sands. Yet this does not really explain it; the contrast is so remarkable that you might almost think there was a deliberate perversity in the association—of a pretty girl who has practically nothing on, with the elemental fury of nuclear fission, which in a fraction of a second could turn the bright flesh to grey ashes. "How with this rage shall Beauty hold a plea Whose action is no stronger than a flower?"

The reasons why a particular word "catches on" and stays in the language are often unknown, and in this case seem particularly mysterious. The mass-psychologists would probably diagnose from it some hidden nuclear neurosis, some secret sickness of our times.

JOHN MOORE, *You English Words*

MERRY CHRISTMAS

When Christ was born of Mary free,
In Bethlem in that fair citie,
Angels sung with mirth and glee,
In excelsis gloria.

c. 1450

After the angels had left them and gone into heaven the shepherds said to one another, " Come, we must go straight to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."

So they went with all speed and found their way to Mary and Joseph; and the baby was lying in the manger.

The New English Bible, 1961

The Christ-child lay on Mary's lap,
His hair was like a light.
(O weary, weary were the world,
But here is all aright.)

The Christ-child lay on Mary's heart,
His hair was like a fire.
(O weary, weary is the world,
But here the world's desire.)

G. K. CHESTERTON

Christmas Kings

It was a perfect night with many stars and the moon in its first quarter. The beauty of the audience in itself was breath-taking. Everyone had a candle and the dark faces of the Basuto, with their brilliant eyes, shone in the soft light; and the sculptural quality of the blankets that wrapped them, and of the cloths that swathed their heads, was emphasized by shadows . . .

When all was ready and the large audience was " seated on the ground " the pageant began. Darkness—then suddenly there appeared across the sky an enormous tinsel star, points and all, that slid in a beam of light on a rope over the heads of the audience and came to rest above the stable . . .

As we sang " Brightest and best of the sons of the morning "

the Three Kings appeared, three men on beautiful ponies, each led by a boy. The commentator announced "a King from the East"—dressed in silken draperies with a jewelled turban on his head. His boy, naked to the waist with baggy silk trousers to the ankles. "A Basuto King," and a blanketed Basuto appeared, his horse led by a herd boy. "The Representative of her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second," and the Senior District Commissioner, bareheaded, in his white uniform, led in by his 12-year-old son, rode on a shining chestnut, a Union Jack under its saddle as a horse-cloth.

Pageant in Basutoland, from The Times

Christmas Candles

The holly's up, the house is all bright,
The tree is ready, the candles alight:
Rejoice and be glad all children tonight.

P. CORNELIUS

Christmas Bells

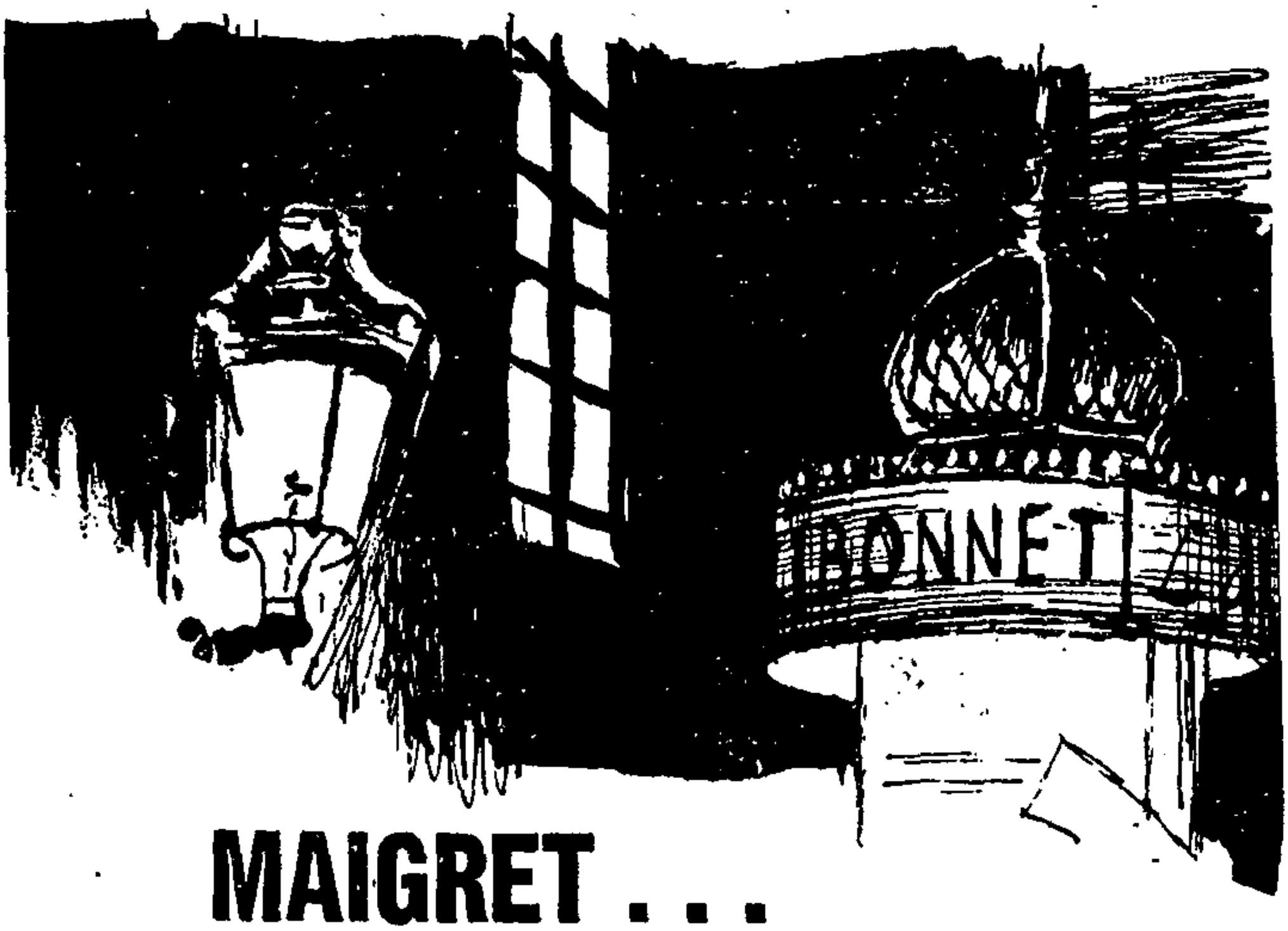
To hear the bells of Venice it is best to come at Christmas, when the air is mist-muffled, and the noises of the city are deepened and richened, like plum-duff. A marvellous clash of bells rings in Christmas morning, noble bells and frenzied bells, spinsterish bells and pompous bells, cracked bells and genial bells and cross reproving bells . . . All these bells, and a hundred others, welcome Christmas with a midnight flourish, and for long echoing minutes after the hour you can hear them ringing down again, softer and softer across the lagoon . . .

JAMES MORRIS, *Venice*

Make We Merry

Make we merry, both more and lesse,
For now is the time of Christmasse.
Let no man come into this hall,
Nor groom, nor page, nor yet marshall,
But that some sport he bring withall,
If that he say he cannot sing,
Some other sport then let him bring,
That it may please at this feasting.
Make we merry, both more and lesse,
For now is the time of Christmasse.

c. 1500



MAIGRET . . .

The Man on the Run

by GEORGES SIMENON

THE four men were packed in the taxi. It was freezing all over Paris. At half past seven in the morning the city looked wan; the wind was whipping the powdery frost along the ground. The thinnest of the four men, on one of the flap seats, had a cigarette stuck to his lower lip and handcuffs on his wrists. The most important one, clothed in a thick overcoat, heavy-jawed, a bowler hat on his head, was smoking his pipe and watching the railings of the Bois de Boulogne file past.

"You want me to put on a big dramatic scene?" the handcuffed man suggested politely. "With struggling, frothing at the mouth, insults, and all?"

Taking the cigarette from between the man's lips and opening the door, for they had arrived at the Porte de Bagatelle, Maigret growled, "Don't overdo it."

The pathways in the Bois were deserted, white as limestone, and as hard. A dozen or so people were standing around at the

corner of a bridle path, and a photographer prepared to go into action on the group as it approached.

But, as instructed, P'tit Louis raised his arms in front of his face.

Maigret, looking surly, swung his head from side to side like a bear, taking everything in—the new blocks of flats on the boulevard Richard-Wallace, their shutters still closed, a few workmen on bikes coming from Puteaux, a lighted tram, two concierges approaching, their hands blue with cold.

" Is this it? " he asked.

The day before he had arranged for the following information to appear in the newspapers:

This time the police will not have been long in clearing up an affair that looked as if it presented insurmountable difficulties. It will be remembered that on Monday morning a park-keeper in the Bois de Boulogne discovered along one of the pathways a hundred yards or so from the Porte de Bagatelle a corpse it was possible to identify on the spot.

It was Ernest Borms, a well-known Viennese doctor who has been in practice at Neuilly for several years. Borms was wearing evening clothes. He must have been attacked during the night of Sunday/Monday, while returning to his flat on the boulevard Richard-Wallace.

A bullet fired at point-blank range from a small-calibre revolver struck him full in the heart.

Borms, still young and handsome and well turned-out, led a fairly social life.

Scarcely forty-eight hours after the murder Police Headquarters have just made an arrest. Tomorrow morning, between seven and eight o'clock, the man concerned will be conducted to the scene of the crime for the purpose of a reconstruction.

As things turned out, this case was to be quoted at Headquarters as the one that was perhaps most characteristically Maigret; but when they spoke of it in his hearing, he had a curious way of turning his head away with a groan.

To proceed, everything was ready. Hardly any gaping onlookers, as planned. It was not for nothing that he had chosen this early hour of the morning. Moreover, among the ten or twelve people who were hanging about, could be spotted some plainclothes men wearing their most innocent air. One of them, Torrence, who loved disguises, was dressed as a milkman. At the sight of him his chief shrugged his shoulders eloquently. If only P'tit Louis didn't overact. An old customer of theirs who had been picked up the day before for picking pockets in the Métro . . .

"You give us a hand tomorrow morning, and we'll see that we aren't too hard on you this time . . ." They had fetched him up from the cells.

"Now, then," growled Maigret, "when you heard the footsteps you were hiding in this corner here, weren't you?"

"As you say, Chief Inspector. I was famished. Stony broke . . . I said to myself, a gent on his way home all dressed up like that must be carrying a walletful. 'Your money or your

life!' was what I hissed right into his ear. And I swear it wasn't my fault the thing went off. I'm quite sure it was the cold made me squeeze the trigger."

11 a.m. Maigret was pacing round his office at Headquarters, smoking solidly and constantly fiddling with the phone.

"Is that you, Chief? Lucas here. I followed the old man who seemed so interested in the reconstruction. Nothing doing there: he's just a lunatic who takes a stroll every morning in the Bois."

"All right, you can come back."

11.15. "Hullo, is that you, Chief? Torrence. I shadowed the young man you tipped me the wink on. He always hangs round when the plainclothes boys are called in. He's an assistant in a shop on the Champs Elysées. Shall I come back?"

From Janvier no call till five to twelve.

"I've got to be quick, Chief. I'm afraid he'll give me the slip. I'm keeping an eye on him in the mirror of the booth. I'm at the Yellow Dwarf Bar, boulevard Rochechouart . . . Yes, he spotted me . . . He's got something on his mind . . . Crossing the Seine, he threw something in the river . . . He's tried over and over to shake me off. Will you be coming?"

So began a chase that was to last five days and nights. Among the hurrying crowds, across an unsuspecting Paris, from bar to bar, bistro to bistro, a lone man on the one hand, and on the other Maigret and his detectives, taking it in turn and, in the long run, just as harassed as the man they were following.

Maigret got out of his taxi opposite the Yellow Dwarf at the busy time just before lunch, and found Janvier leaning on the bar. He wasn't troubling to put on any facade of innocence. Quite the opposite.

"Which one is it?"

The detective motioned with his jaw towards a man sitting in the corner at a pedestal table. The man was watching them; his eyes, which were a light blue-grey, gave a foreign cast to his face. Nordic? Slav? More likely a Slav. He was wearing a grey overcoat, a well-cut suit, a soft felt hat. About thirty-five years old, so far as one could judge. He was pale, close shaven.

"What're you having, Chief? A hot toddy?"

"Toddy let it be. What's *he* drinking?"

"Brandy. It's his fifth this morning. You mustn't mind if I sound slurred, but I've had to follow him round all the bistros. He's tough, you know. Look at him—it's been like that all morning. He wouldn't lower his eyes for all the kingdoms of the earth."

It was true. And it was strange. You couldn't call it arrogance or defiance. The man was just looking at them. If he felt any anxiety, it was concealed. It was sadness rather that his face expressed, but a calm, reflective sadness.

"At Bagatelle, when he noticed you were watching him, he went off straight away, and I fell into step behind him. He hadn't gone a hundred yards before he turned round. Then, instead of leaving the Bois, as he apparently meant to do, he strode off down the first path he came to. He turned round again. He recognised me. He sat down on a bench, despite the cold, and I stopped. More than once I had the impression he wanted to speak to me, but in the end he shrugged his shoulders and set off again.

"At the Porte Dauphine I almost lost him, for he jumped into a taxi, and it was just luck that I found one almost immediately. He got out at the place de l'Opéra, and rushed into the Métro. One behind the other, we changed trains five times before he began to realise he wouldn't shake me off that way . . .

"We went up again into the street. We were at place Clichy. Since then we have been going from bar to bar. I was waiting for one with a telephone booth where I could keep him in sight. When he saw me phoning, he gave a bitter little laugh. Honestly, you'd have sworn after that he was waiting for you."

"Ring up H.Q. Lucas and Torrence are to hold themselves ready to join me as soon as they're called. And a photographer, too, from the technical branch, with a miniature camera."

"Waiter!" the man called out. "What do I owe you?"

"Three-fifty."

"I bet he's a Pole," Maigret breathed to Janvier. "On our way . . ."

They didn't get far. At place Blanche they followed the man into a small restaurant, sat down at the next table. It was an Italian place, and they ate pasta.

At three, Lucas came to take over from Janvier, who was with Maigret at a brasserie opposite the gare du Nord.

"The photographer?" Maigret asked.

"He's waiting outside to get him as he leaves."

And, sure enough, when the Pole left the place, having finished reading the papers, a detective hurried up. At less than three feet, he took a shot of him. The man raised his hand quickly to his face, but it was already too late. Then, proving that he knew what was going on, he cast a reproachful look at Maigret.

Aha, my little man, Maigret said to himself, you have some good reason for not revealing where you live. Well, you may be patient, but so am I, at least as much as you . . .

By evening a few snowflakes were fluttering down in the street; the stranger walked on, hands in pockets, waiting for bedtime.

"I'll take over for the night, Chief?" Lucas suggested.

"No. I'd rather you coped with the photograph. Look at the hotel registrations first. Then see what you can find out in the foreign quarters. That fellow knows his Paris. He didn't arrive yesterday. There must be people who know him."

"How about putting his picture in the papers?"

Maigret eyed his subordinate with scorn. How could Lucas, who had been working with him for so many years, fail to understand? Had the police one single clue? Nothing. Not one piece of evidence. A man killed during the night in the Bois de Boulogne. No weapon is found. No prints. Dr. Borms lives alone, and his only servant doesn't know where he spent the previous evening. "Do as I say. Get going . . ."

Finally at midnight the man decides to go into a hotel. Maigret follows him in. It is a second- or even third-class hotel.

"I want a room."

"Will you register here, please?"

He registers hesitantly, his fingers stiff with cold. He looks Maigret up and down as if to say, "If you think that's any problem—I can write any name that comes."

And, in fact, he has done so. Nicolas Slaatkovitch, resident of Cracow, arrived the day before in Paris. It is all false, obviously.

Maigret telephones to Headquarters. They hunt through the files of furnished lodgings, the registers of foreigners, they contact the frontier posts. No Nicolas Slaatkovitch.

"And a room for you?" the proprietor asks with distaste, for he senses the presence of a policeman.

"No, thank you. I'll spend the night on the stairs."

It's safer that way. He sits down on a step in front of the door of Room 7. Twice the door opens. The man peers through the gloom, makes out Maigret's silhouette, and ends up by going to bed. In the morning his face is rough with stubble. He hasn't been able to change his shirt. He hasn't even got a comb, and his hair is rumpled.

Lucas has just arrived. "I'll do the next shift, Chief?"

Maigret refuses to leave his stranger. He has watched him pay the bill. He has seen him grow pale. He guesses his thoughts . . .

And a little later, in a bar where, almost side by side, they are breakfasting off white coffee and croissants, the man openly counts up his fortune. One hundred-franc note, two twenty-franc pieces, one of ten, and some small change. He makes a bitter grimace.

Well, he won't get far on that. When he arrived at the Bois de Boulogne, he had come straight from home, for he was freshly shaved, not a speck of dust, not a crease in his clothes. He hadn't even looked to see how much money he had on him.

What he threw in the Seine, Maigret guesses, were his identification papers, perhaps visiting-cards. At all costs he wants to prevent their finding out his address.

And so the round of the homeless starts again: the loitering in front of shops or round street traders, the bars one has to go into from time to time, even if it's only to sit down, especially when it's cold outside, the papers one reads in the brasseries . . .

One hundred and fifty francs. No more lunchtime restaurant. The man makes do with hard-boiled eggs, which he eats, along with his pint, standing up at the bar counter, while Maigret gulps down sandwiches.

For a long time the man has been thinking about going into a cinema, his hand fingering the small change in his pocket. Better to stick it out. He walks . . . and walks . . .

There is, incidentally, one detail that strikes Maigret. It is always in the same districts that this exhausting stroll takes place: from the Trinité to place Clichy, from place Clichy to Barbès, by way of rue Caulaincourt . . . from Barbès to the gare du Nord and rue Lafayette. Besides, the man's afraid of being recognised, isn't he? Of course he's chosen the districts farthest from his home or hotel, those he didn't usually frequent . . .

Does he, like many foreigners, haunt Montparnasse? The parts around the Panthéon?

His clothes indicate he is reasonably well off. They are comfortable, sober, and well cut. A professional man, no doubt. What's more, he wears a ring, so he's married.

Maigret has had to agree to hand over to Torrence, and has dashed home. Madame Maigret is displeased: her sister has come up from Orléans, she has taken a lot of trouble over the dinner, and her husband, after a shave and a change of clothes, is already off again, and doesn't know when he'll be back.

He dives off to the quai des Orfèvres. "Lucas hasn't left anything for me?"

Yes, he has. There's a note from the sergeant. He's been round several of the Polish and Russian quarters showing the photograph. Nobody knows the man. Nothing from the political circles, either. As a last resource he has had a large number of copies made of the famous photograph, and police are now going from door to door in all the districts of Paris, from concierge to concierge, showing the document to bar-owners and waiters.

"Hullo, is that Chief Inspector Maigret? This is one of the

usherettes at the newsreel cinema on the boulevard de Strasbourg. It's a gentleman—Monsieur Torrence. He's asked me to call you to say he's here, but he didn't want to leave his place in the auditorium."

Not so stupid, on the stranger's part. He has worked out that it's the best heated place to pass a few hours cheaply—two francs to get in, and you can see the programme several times.

A curious intimacy has sprung up between follower and followed, between the man, whose face is now dark with stubble and whose clothes are crumpled, and Maigret, who never for a moment stops trailing him. There is even one rather comic point: they've both caught colds. Their noses are red; they pull out their handkerchiefs almost in time with one another. Once, in spite of himself, the stranger had to smile as he saw Maigret going off into a series of sneezes.

After five consecutive newsreel programmes, a dirty hotel on the boulevard de la Chapelle. Same name on the register. And again Maigret installs himself on the stairs. But, as this is a hotel with a casual trade, he is disturbed every ten minutes by couples going up and down; they stare at him curiously, and the women don't find him a reassuring sight.

When he's at the end of his tether, or at breaking-point, will the man decide to go home? In one of the brasseries, where he stays long enough to take off his grey coat, Maigret without more ado seizes the garment and looks inside the collar. The coat comes from Old England, the shop on the boulevard des Italiens. It is a readymade coat, and the shop must have sold dozens of others like it. One clue, however: it is last year's model, so the stranger has been in Paris for a year at least. And in a year he must have found somewhere to hang out . . .

Maigret has started drinking grog to cure his cold. The other now pays out his money drop by drop. He drinks his coffee straight; he lives on croissants and hard-boiled eggs.

The news from the office is always the same: nothing to report. Nobody recognises the photograph of the Pole. No one has heard of any missing person.

As to the dead man, nothing there, either. A good practice, he made a lot of money, wasn't interested in politics, went out a lot, and, as he dealt with nervous diseases, most of his patients were women.

There was one experiment Maigret had not yet had the chance of seeing through to the end: how long it would take for a well-bred, well-cared-for, well-dressed man to lose his outward polish.

Four days. As he now knew. To begin with, the unshavenness. The first morning the man looked like a lawyer, or a doctor, or

an architect, or a businessman; you could picture him leaving his cosy flat. A four-day growth transformed him to such an extent that if one had now put his pictures in the papers and referred to the Bois de Boulogne affair, everyone would have said, "You can see he's a murderer."

The bitter weather and lack of sleep had reddened his eyelids, and his cheeks were feverish from his cold. His shoes, which were no longer polished, seemed to have lost their shape. His coat weighed on him, and his trousers were baggy round the knees.

Even his walk was no longer the same. He sidled along the wall, he lowered his eyes when people looked at him. Another thing: he turned his head away when he passed a restaurant where one could see people sitting down to large meals . . .

"Your last twenty francs," Maigret worked out, "poor wretch. What now?"

Lucas, Torrence, and Janvier took over from him from time to time, but he left his post as little as possible. He would burst into the quai des Orfèvres, would see his Chief.

"You'd be well advised to take a rest, Maigret."

It was a peevish Maigret, touchy as if he were torn between contradictory emotions. "Am I or am I not supposed to be finding the murderer?"

"Of course."

"Well then, back to my post." As if resentfully, he would sigh. "I wonder where we'll sleep tonight."

Only twenty francs left. Not even that—when he got back, Torrence said the man had eaten three hard-boiled eggs and drunk two rum coffees in a bar on the corner of the rue Montmartre.

"Eight francs fifty. That leaves eleven francs fifty."

Maigret admired him. Far from hiding himself, he now trailed him quite openly, sometimes walking right next to him, and he had some difficulty to refrain from speaking to him. "Come now, don't you think it's time to have a proper meal? Somewhere there's a warm home where you're expected. A bed, slippers, a razor. Eh? And a good dinner."

But the man continued to prowl under the arc lamps of les Halles, like one who no longer knows where to turn. In and out among the heaps of cabbages and carrots, stepping out of the way at the whistle of the train or when the market-gardeners' lorries passed.

"Hasn't even the price of a hotel room."

That evening the National Meteorological Office registered a temperature of eight degrees centigrade below zero. The man

treated himself to hot sausages from a stall in the streets. Now he would reek of garlic and fat the whole night through.

Once he tried to slip into a shelter and stretch out in the corner. A policeman, whom Maigret wasn't able to stop in time, moved him on. He was hobbling now. Along the quais. The pont des Arts. As long as he didn't take it into his head to throw himself into the Seine. Maigret didn't feel he had the courage to jump in after him into the black water that was beginning to fill with drift ice.

The man was walking along the towpath level, where the tramps lay grumbling and, under the bridges, the good places were taken.

In a small street close to the place Maubert, through the windows of a strange bistro, old men could be seen sleeping with their heads on the tables. Twenty sous, wine included. The man stared in through the gloom. Then, with a fatalistic shrug, he pushed open the door.

Before it closed behind him, Maigret had time to be sickened by the smelly gust that struck him in the face. He preferred to stay outside. He called a policeman, posted him in his place on the pavement while he went to telephone Lucas to take over for the night.

"I've been trying to get you for the last hour, Chief. We've found him! Thanks to a concierge. The fellow's called Stefan Strevzki, an architect, thirty-four years old, born in Warsaw, been in France for three years. Works for a firm in the faubourg Saint-Honoré. Married to a Hungarian, a magnificent creature by name of Dora. Living at Passy, rue de la Pompe, in a twelve-thousand-franc flat. No political interests. The concierge has never seen the dead man. Stefan left the house earlier than usual on Monday morning. She was surprised not to see him return, but she wasn't worried, having ascertained—"

"What time is it?"

"Half past three. I'm alone at Headquarters. I've had some beer brought up, but it's too cold."

"Listen, Lucas, you're going—yes, I know, too late for the morning ones. But the evening ones . . . understand?"

That morning the man's clothing gave off a muffled odour of poverty. His eyes were sunken. The look he cast at Maigret in the pale morning contained the deepest pathos and reproach.

Had he not been driven, little by little, but for all that at a dizzy pace, to the very lowest depths? He turned up the collar of his overcoat. He didn't leave the neighbourhood, but he rushed into a bistro that had just opened and downed four quick

drinks, as if to rid himself of the appalling after-taste the night had left in his throat and chest.

So much the worse for him. From now on he no longer had anything. Nothing was left for him but to walk up and down the streets the frost was making slippery. He must be stiff all over. He was limping with his left leg. From time to time he stopped and looked around despairingly.

As soon as he stopped going into cafés where there was a telephone, Maigret could no longer summon a relief. Back again along the quais. Then that mechanical gesture of flipping through the book bargains, turning the pages, pausing to check the authenticity of an engraving or a print. A freezing wind was sweeping across the Seine. The water tinkled as the barges moved through it, as tiny fragments of ice glittered and jostled against one another. From a distance Maigret caught sight of the windows of his own office. His sister-in-law had gone back to Orléans. As long as Lucas had . . .

He didn't know yet that this dreadful trail was to become a classic, and that for years the older generation of detectives would recount the details to new colleagues. The silliest thing about it all was that it was a ridiculous detail that upset him most: the man had a pimple on his forehead, a pimple that, on close inspection, turned out to be a boil, which was changing from red to purple.

As long as Lucas . . .

At midday the man, who certainly knew his Paris, made for the free soup kitchen that is situated at the end of the boulevard Saint-Germain. He took his place in the queue of down-and-outs. An old man spoke to him, but he pretended not to understand. Then another, with a pockmarked face, spoke to him in Russian.

Maigret crossed over to the opposite pavement, and paused. When he was driven to have sandwiches in a bistro, he half turned so that the other should not see him eating them through the windows.

The poor wretches moved forward slowly, went in, four or maybe six at a time, to the room where bowls of hot soup were being served. The queue grew longer. From time to time there was a shove from the back, which aroused protests from some of the others.

One o'clock. A newsboy appeared at the far end of the street; he was running, his body sloping forward. "*L'Intransigeant!* Get your *Intran*—" He, too, was in a hurry to get there before the others. He could tell his customers from far off, and he paid no attention to the queue of down-and-outs. "Get your—"

"Pst!" Timidly, the man raised his hand to attract the boy's attention. The others stared at him. So he had still a few sous to spend on a paper?

Maigret, too, summoned the boy, unfolded the paper and, to his relief, found what he was looking for—the photograph of a beautiful young woman smiling out of the front page.

STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE

A young Polish woman, Madame Dora Strevzki, who disappeared four days ago from her home in Passy, 17 rue de la Pompe, has now been reported missing. Her husband, Monsieur Stefan Strevzki, has also been missing from his home since the previous day—i.e., Monday—and the concierge, who reported the disappearance to the police, states . . .

The man had only five or six yards more to go in the queue before he could claim his bowl of steaming soup, when he left his place in the line and was almost run over by a bus. He reached the opposite pavement just as Maigret drew level.

"I'm ready," he said simply. "Take me away. I'll answer all your questions . . ."

They were all standing in the corridor of Headquarters: Lucas, Janvier, Torrence, and others who had not been in on the case but knew about it. As they passed, Lucas made a triumphant signal to Maigret.

A door opened and shut. Beer and sandwiches on the table.

"Take something to eat first."

Not so easy. Mouthfuls that stuck in his throat. Then, at last, "Now that she's gone and is somewhere safe . . ."

Maigret couldn't face him: he had to turn away and poke the stove.

"When I read the accounts of the murder in the papers I had already for a long time suspected Dora of deceiving me with that man. I knew, too, she wasn't his only mistress. Knowing Dora and her impetuous nature . . . You understand? If he wanted to get rid of her, I knew she was capable of . . . And she always carried an ivory-handled gun in her handbag. When the papers reported that an arrest had been made and there was to be a reconstruction of the crime, I wanted to see . . ."

Maigret would have liked to be able to say to him, as the British police do, "I must warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence against you."

He had kept his coat on, and he was still wearing his hat. "Now that she's safe . . . For I suppose . . ." He looked about him anxiously. A suspicion crossed his mind.

"She must have understood when I didn't go home. I

knew it would end like that—that Borms wasn't the man for her, that she wouldn't accept the role of a mere plaything, and that she'd come back to me. She went out alone that Sunday evening, as she had been doing recently. She must have killed him then."

Maigret blew his nose. He took a long time over it. A ray of sunlight—the harsh winter sunlight that goes with sharp frost—came in the window. The pimple or boil gleamed on the forehead of the man—as Maigret found he had to go on calling him.

"So your wife killed him. When she found out he had never really cared for her. And you, you realised she had done it. And you didn't want . . ."

He suddenly went up to the Pole. "I'm sorry, old man," he grunted, as if he was talking to an old friend. "I had to find out the truth, hadn't I? It was my duty."

Then he opened the door. "Bring in Madame Dora Strevzki. Lucas, you carry on. I—"

And for the next two days nobody saw him again at Headquarters. His chief telephoned him at home. "Well now, Maigret. You know she's confessed, and—by the way, how's your cold? They tell me—"

"It's nothing, Chief. It's getting better. Another day. How is he?"

"What? Who?"

"He—the man."

"Oh, I see. He's got hold of the best lawyer in Paris. He has hopes—you know, crimes passionnels . . ."

Maigret went back to bed and sank into a grog-and-aspirin stupor. When, later on, he was asked about the investigation, his grumbled "What investigation?" was enough to discourage further questions.

As for the man, he came to see him once or twice a week, and kept him informed of the hopes the defence were holding out.

It wasn't a straightforward acquittal: one year's imprisonment, with sentence suspended.

And the man—it was he who taught Maigret to play chess.

L'homme dans la rue © Georges Simenon
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Translated by J. E. Malcolm

PERSUASION

Sat 2 Dec 1815. *We shall be delighted to see Edward on Monday— A turkey will be equally welcome with himself.*

JANE AUSTEN *to her sister, Cassandra*

FIREBUG

They flared for one night:
hands of flame waving hullo and good-bye

BY ALAN SILLITOE

I SMILE as much as feel ashamed at the memory of some of the things I did when I was a lad, even though I caused my mother a lot of trouble. I used to pinch her matches and set fire to heaps of paper and anything I could get my eyes on. I was scruffy and no bigger than sixpennorth o' coppers, so's you'd think I wasn't capable of harming a fly.

People came straight out with it: "Poor little bogger. Butter wouldn't melt in his mouth."

But my auntie used to say, "He might not be so daft as he looks when he grows up," and she was right, I can see that now.

Her husband had a few brains as well: "He's quiet, nobody can deny it, but still waters run deep; I wouldn't trust him an inch." At this the rest of the family got on to him and called him bully with neither sense nor feeling, said I was delicate and might not have long for this world—while I went on eating my way through a fistful of bread and jam as if I hadn't heard a dickybird and would last for ever.

This match craze must have started when, still in leggings, I was traipsed downtown by my mother one day mid week. The streets weren't all that crowded and I held on to her carrier-bag, dragging a bit I should think, slurring my other hand along the cold glass of shop windows full of tricycles and forts for Christmas that I would never get—unless they were given to me as a reward for being good enough not to pinch 'em. As usual my mother was harassed to death—on her way to ask for a bit more time to pay off the arrears of 24 Slum Yard I shouldn't wonder—and I was grizzling because I couldn't share as much as I'd have liked in the razzle-dazzle of the downtown street.

Suddenly I left off moaning: felt the air go quiet and blue, as if a streak of sly lightning had stiffened everybody dead in their tracks. Even motor cars stopped.

"What's up, Mam?" I said—or whined I expect, because I could only whine up to fourteen: then I went to work and started talking clear and proper, from shock.

Before she could tell me, a bloody great bell began clanging—louder than any school or church call—bowling its ding-dong from every place at once, so that I looked quickly at the up-windows to wonder where it was coming from. I felt myself going white, knees quaking; not that I was terrified: I was right in the middle of another world, as if the one and only door to it had a bell on saying PRESS, and somebody was leaning his elbow spot-on and drilling right into my startled brain.

The bells got louder, so's I couldn't any longer hope it was only the cops or an ambulance. It was something I'd never seen before nor dreamt of either: a flying redfaced monster batting along the narrow street at a flat-out sixty, as if it had been thrown there like a toy; only this weighed a ton or two and made the ground shake under me, like a procession for the Coronation or something—but coming at top speed, as if a couple o' Russian tanks were after its guts and shooting fire behind.

"What is it, Mam? What is it?" I whined when it got quiet enough to speak.

"On'y a fire," she told me. "A house's on fire and they're fire-engines going to put it out."

Then another couple of engines came belting through the deadened street, both together it seemed, turning all the air into terrifying klaxons. I started screaming, and didn't stop until I'd gone down in a fit.

Mam and a man carried me into the nearest shop and when I woke up there was nothing but toys all around, so's I thought I was in heaven; to keep me calm the shopkeeper gave me a lead soldier which I was glad to grab, though I'd rather have had the toy fire-engine that caught at my sight as soon as I stood up. It was as if my eyes had opened for the first time since I was born—red with yellow ladders and blue men in helmets—but he turned me away to ask if I was all right, and when I nodded walked me back into the street out of temptation. I was a bogger in them days—I was and all.

The long school holidays of summer seemed to go on for years. When I could scrounge fourpence I'd nip to the continuous down-town pictures after dinner and drop myself in one of the front seats, to stay there for hours and see the same film over and over till driven out by hunger or God Save the King. But I didn't often get money to go, and now and again Mam would bundle me into the street so's her nerves could have a rest from my "give-me-this-and-I-want-that" sort of grizzling.

I'd be quite happy—after the shock of being slung out had worn off—to sit on the pavement making wrinkles in the hot tar

with a spoon I'd managed to grab on my way through the kitchen, or drawing patterns with a piece of slate or matchstick. Other kids would be rolling marbles or running at rounders, or a string of 'em would scream out of an entry after playing hide-and-seek in somebody's backyard. A few would be away at seaside camp, or out in the fields and woods on Sunday treats, so it worn't as noisy as it might have been.

I remember once I sat dead-quiet all afternoon doing nothing but talk to myself for minutes at a time on what had happened to me in the last day or two and about things I hoped to do as soon as I got either money or matches in my fist—chuntering ten to the dozen as if somebody unknown to me had put a penny in the gramophone of my brain as they walked by. Other people passing looked at me gone-out, but I didn't give a bogger and just went on talking until the noise of a fire-engine in the distance came through to my locked-in world.

It sounded like a gale just starting up, an aeroplane of bells going along at ground level with folded wings, about ten streets off but far enough away to seem as if it was in another town behind the big white clouds of summer, circling round a dream I'd had about a fire a few nights ago.

It didn't sound real, though I knew what it meant now, after my downtown fit a long time back in the winter. Hot sun and empty sky stopped it being loud, I suppose, but my heart nearly fell over itself at the brass-band rattle, it went so fast—sitting in my mouth like a cough-drop or dolly-mixture getting bigger as the bells went on.

Most of the other kids ran hollering to where the bells came from, even when I thought they were too far off for anybody else to hear, went clobbering up street and round a corner until everywhere was quiet and empty except the bells now getting louder all the time.

I wanted to join in the chase, fly towards fire and smoke as fast as my oversize wellingtons would take me, to see all them helmeted men with hatchets and ladders and hosepipes trying to stop the red flames but not managing so that the only thing left was a couple of cinders one on top of the other. And then I'd try to sneak up and blow the top one off. But I'd never be able to catch them, that much I knew as sure as God made little apples, so I waited till my face changed back from white to mucky and my blood stopped bumping, and went on playing tar games in the sun.

But sometimes I'd sit and hear the bells of a fire-engine that none of the other kids would hear, would leave off playing and listen hard for it to come closer, hoping to see one swivel around

the bend at the top of our street and pour down with its big nose getting closer—and if it did I wouldn't know whether to stick by and see what happened or run screaming in to Mam and get her to hide me under the stairs. I was always hoping for a sweltering fire close by so that I could watch 'em trying to put it out—hope for one at the bike factory or pub or in some shop or other.

But I just heard them now and again in my mind, sat—before I cottoned on to this—waiting for the others to hear it and run yelling to where it camé from, but they didn't and then I knew it was just in me the bells had played. This was only on summer days though, as if the sun melted wax in my tabs and let me heár better than anybody else—even things that didn't happen at all.

But fire-engine fires were rare as five-pound notes, and up to then the nearest a big blaze ever came to our street was on Bonfire Night. They told us about Bonfire Night at school, about how this poor bloke Guy Fawkes got chucked on a fire because he wanted to blow up Parliament, and I learnt as well about the Great Fire of London where all the town got lit because everything was built of wood. What a sight that must have been! Thousands and thousands of houses going up like matchboxes.

Still, I didn't like to think of people getting burnt to death, I do know that. I was terrified on it, and so was Dad, and though he used to poke the fire cold out every night, and pull the rugs a long way back from the grate and set the chairs under the window, I was still worried in bed later in case a hot coal lit up again and walked to right across the room where the rugs were; or that somebody next door would go to sleep with his pipe lit and the first thing I'd know was a rubber hose slooshing water through the window and on to us four kids. I wouldn't even have heard the ding-dong belling of the fire-engine I slept so deep—and that would have broken my heart.

On Bonfire Night fires were lit like cherry trees, two or three to a long street like ours, and the only thing I ever prayed for was that it wouldn't rain after the bigger lads got busy and set their matches under piles of mattresses, boxes, and old sofas. The flames climbed so high by ten that house walls glowed and shone as if somebody had scrubbed them clean, and I used to go from one fire-hill to another eating my bread and jam and jumping out of the way when firecrackers got close. I was so excited the bread almost wouldn't go down, and my breath gulped as the warmth tried to ram itself through my throat when I went too near the fire.

If only flames like this blazed all winter, was my one big wish. But they didn't, my brain told me: they flared for one night,

hands of fire waving hullo and good-bye while we shouted and danced, then died to a glowing hump of grey ash for corporation carts to clear away like the bodies of big runover dogs next morning. Christmas was a letdown after these mountainous fires.

This Bonfire Night I stayed out till twelve hoping, now that everybody else had gone, for a last-minute flame to shoot up for one second and show its face only to me; but all that remained was the smell of fire-ash and gunpowder. Then in the dead quietness I heard the bell of a far-off fire-engine, flying down some empty street with bells full on, passing houses that were so quiet you might think God had gone before and like some fat publican shouted "Time" in each.

I looked at the fire again in the hope that it would flare and bring the distant engine to where I was, frightened a bit at the same time because I was on my own and would have nobody to stand with if it did. All I got for my waiting though was a spot of ice-cold rain on my arm, and the sound of another big drop burying itself with a hiss chock in the middle of the ash. And the fire-engine bell went tingling on till I couldn't hear it no more, off to some street where, I thought, they had a bigger fire than could ever be built in ours.

My first fires were nothing to speak of: baby ones built in the backyard with a single sheet of paper that burnt out in half a second like celluloid, scattering like black butterflies at the draught of another kid.

Mam clouted my tab-hole and took the matches off me—to begin with—but realising after a while how it kept me occupied at a time when she was hard up for peace and quiet she let me play: a couple of old newspapers and half a dozen matches stopped me whining for an hour, which was cheap at the price. For Mam was badly right enough, holding her heart all the time and blue in the face when anything harassed her, so that even if I'd wanted to make a row Dad would have thumped me one.

So nobody bothered me and my midget fires, because they could see I wasn't doing no harm. One or two of the nosy parkers went as far as to tut-tut loud when they looked over the fence in passing and saw wisps of smoke floating in front of my eyes, but they soon got used to the sight of it and stopped pulling meagrims. They must have known Mam knew I'd got the matches, and didn't want a row with her because she was still a wild fighter, badly or not.

I soon stopped making fires outside our back door though because one day I collected a whole tin of matchsticks off the street and they burnt so long in a bad wind that when Mam

smelled 'em up in the bedroom Dad kicked the fire out with his boots and locked the gate on me. I'd only got a couple of matches left, and had forgotten to snatch up the newspaper when Dad's fist lifted me, so I was feeling hard done by as I sulked near the yard lavatories.

At the first nip of a cold rainspot I went into the nearest because if there was one thing I didn't like it was getting wet: it made me feel so miserable I could have put my head in the gas oven or gone to the railway line and played with an express till I was run over. Whenever a spot of rain fell I sheltered in a shop doorway or entry until it stopped even if I was there for hours, because when rain landed on me it was like a shock of pins and needles sending me off my nut, as if every bit of me was a funnybone. And big rain was worse than ever, for it seemed to stick into me like falling penknives.

If I hadn't opened the door and gone in to get out of the rain I'd never have noticed the wad of newspapers stuffed behind the lavatory pipe. Two or three thick Sunday ones, the sort I liked because they'd got bigger letters on the front page than any. Once at Aunt Ethel's one of my grown-up cousins was reading the Sunday paper and his brother put a light to the bottom for a lark, and the other didn't know what was going off till flames reached the terrible headlines and started licking his nose. Or maybe he did, for he stayed as calm as if it had happened before: he was near the range and when the whole paper was in flames just leaned over and let it fall in the firegrate to burn itself out—as if he'd read all he wanted to anyway—and calmly asked his mam if there was any more tea in the pot. I laughed at the thought of it for days and days.

As soon as the heap of papers caught I ran out of the yard and rattled to the bottom of the street, went up to a gang of pals and played marbles so's nobody'd twig anything.

I was so excited at what I'd done, and at listening all the time for a fire-engine—that I hoped somebody'd called to come rumbling full tilt down the cobbled street with bells ringing—that I lost all my five marbles because I hardly knew what I was doing.

I didn't hear the bells of a fire-engine though: the only ringing that went on was all night in my ears after the old man had given me a good pasting when I went home a long time later.

The whole yard talked about my fire-making for days: "That little varmint wants taming. He's got too much on it."

"You'd better lock your door when you go over the road shopping, or he might sneak in an' send your home up in flames."

"If I was his mother I'd tek 'im to 'ave 'is brains tested,

though she can't do a sight at the moment, poor woman. So he gets neglected. I don't know, I don't."

"He'd be better off at Cumberland Hall," another woman said—which made me shiver when I heard it because Cumberland Hall's a stark cold place they send kids to as ain't got no mam and dad, where they hit you with sticks, feed you on bread and porridge, and get you up at six in the morning—or so Mam once told me when I asked her about it.

And it was a long way in the woods, she said, so's I knew if I got sent there I wouldn't be able to hear a fire-engine for years and years. Unless I made a fire on the sly and one had to come and put it out, then I might, but you couldn't depend on it because I knew by now that fire-engines didn't fly ding-donging to every bit of fire in the open air: they had to be big ones, which meant I was beginning to learn. Also I didn't want to get caught again and have my head batted, for as well as it hurting a long time afterwards it might send me daft or dead which would be terrible because then I wouldn't be able to make the fires or hear the engines.

So I knew I'd got to be careful next time and thought about how secret you could be if you did it in a wood and how big a fire it'd grow to if once it got going and the wind blew on it. I dreamt about it for weeks, saw yellow match-light jump to paper, spread to dry leaves and twigs, climb to dead wood and branches and bushes and little trees and big trees, changing colour from red to blue and green and back to red as the big bell ding-donged through everything, racing from the main road. And all the firemen would just stand there, helmets off and scratching their heads because they wouldn't have a dog's chance of putting it out. I was sweating myself at the thought of it.

Once on the pictures I saw where a big oilwell caught fire, and they had to have dynamite to put it out. Dynamite! Think of that!

Many's the pasting I got from the teacher at school for being half asleep in these daydreams. Once I was called out to the front for it, and as he was holding the strap up to let me have it, the thundery quiet of the classroom was filled with the roar of a fire-engine out on the boulevard. A few seconds went by as everybody wondered where it was going, and I thought the teacher would let me off at such a fire-awful noise—though I don't know why he should—but the next thing I knew the strap had hit the outstretched palm of my hand as if a large stone had fallen on it from a thousand feet up. The bastard.

I should have been listening to him telling us about how the army of some batchy king or other chopped up the senseless

blokes of another army; then the two kings shook hands and signed a bit of paper to say things should be the same, and all the soldiers just sat in gangs around their little fires boiling soup and laughing, when all I thought of was how all these little fires could be joined together into a big blaze, as big as a mountain with the two kings on top instead of that poor bloke called Guy Fawkes—just because he'd got a funny name.

I went off early one morning, a sunny day one Sunday all by myself after a breakfast of tomatoes and bacon. Dad was glad to get rid of me because Mam was still badly and the doctor was up with her. She hadn't spoken to me for a week because she'd been sleeping most of the time—and all I had to do, Dad said, was keep out of her way and then she'd get better quicker.

Well, I was glad to because I'd got other things to brood on, walking down the street well into the wall with a box of matches and some folded paper in my pockets, my hand clutching the matches because I didn't want them to jump out—or fall through the hole that might get wider as I walked along. I'd be hard put to it to get any more if they did, because I hadn't got a penny to my name.

Admitted I could always stop and ask people to give me a match, but it was risky, because I'd often tried it, though sometimes I managed to beg one or two from a bloke who didn't care what I was up to and perhaps wanted me to smoke myself to death, or set Nottingham on fire. But mostly the people I asked either pushed me away and said clear off, or told me they were sorry but their matches were safeties and no good without a box.

Now and again a bloke with safeties would give me a few anyway—wanting to help me and hoping I'd find some way to strike 'em, though I never did, unless I lit them with proper matches I latched on to later. The people I never asked were women, after the first one or two had threatened to fetch a copper, being clever enough to twig what I was up to.

Wind blew my hair about as I crossed the railway bridge by the station. Trolley buses trundled both ways and mostly empty, though even if I'd had a penny I'd still have walked, for walking my legs off made me feel I was going somewhere, strolling along though not too slow and enjoying the faces of fresh air that met me by the time I got out to the open spaces of Western Boulevard.

I was feeling free and easy, and hoped a copper wouldn't stop me and ask what I was doing with paper and matches sticking out of my pockets. But nobody bothered me and I turned down from the bridge and on to the canal bank, looking in deep locks now and again, at the endless bottoms of water, as if the steep sides

of the smooth wall still went on underneath—to the middle of the earth as far as I knew.

A funny thought came to me: how long would it take for this canyon with water at the bottom to be filled to the brim with the fine and flimsy ash from cigarettes, only that? I sat on a lock gate and wondered: how many people need to smoke how many fags for how many years? Donkey's years, I supposed. I'd be an old man on two sticks by then. Even teachers at school wouldn't be able to work that sum out. I stood up and had a long pee down into the smooth surface, my pasty face in the mirror of it shivered to bits when the first piss struck.

After a good while of more walking I cut off along a lane at the next bridge leading towards the wood I'd set my heart on: a toy for Christmas. I was excited, already heard fire-engines crossing the sky, bells going off miles away, a sound that thrilled me even though I did know I was hearing things.

The wheat was tall, yellow, and dusty-looking over hedges and gates, bushes so tall along the lane that sometimes I couldn't see the sky. Faded fag packets and scorched newspaper had been thrown among nettles and scrub by lads and courting couples out from Nottingham, for the fields weren't all that far off from the black and smothercating streets. My teeth still felt funny at the screams of tree-trunks from Sunday overtime at the sawmill not far off, though after a while I couldn't hear anything at all, except the odd thrush or blackbird nipping about like bats trying to get their own shadows in their beaks. I'd been out here a time or two with pals looking for eggs in birds' nests but I wasn't interested in that any more because my uncle once caught me with some and told me it was wicked and wrong to rob birds of their young uns.

So I walked by the hedge, keeping well down till I got to a gap. It was dim and cool in the wood, and so lonely that I'd have been frightened if I hadn't a pocketful of paper and matches to keep me company. Bushes were covered in blackberries, and I stopped now and again to take my pick, careful not to scratch myself or eat too many in case I got the gut ache when I went to bed at night.

It was long and narrow, not the sort of wood you could go deep into, so I jumped over a stream and found the middle quick enough, a clearing, more or less, with a dry and dying bush on one side that looked just ready for a fire. I worked like a galley slave, piling up dead twigs and leaves over my bit of paper that soon you could hardly see. I wondered about the noise but what could I do? and anyway soon forgot my worry and went on working.

I knew it must be past dinnertime when I stood back to look

at my bonfire heap. Sweating like a bull—though nothing to how them trees would be sweating in a bit, I grinned—I measured the chances of a fire-engine fire: the bush was sure to light and so would the two small trees on either side, but unless there was a good wind the main trees would be hard put to it.

The first match was slammed out by the wind that blew strong over my shoulder as if it had been lurking there specially; the head of the second fell off before I could get it under the paper; the third-time lucky one caught a treat, was like a red red robin breaking out of its shell, and I soon had to stand back to keep the burning blazes off my hand.

I wanted to put it out at first. The words nearly choked me: "Stread on it. Kick it to bits."

I twisted my hands up in front of me, but couldn't move, just stood there like the nogood tripehound Dad often called me—and which I dare say I was—until the smoke made me step farther back—and back I went, until my head scraped into a big-barked tree.

The noise of the fire must have been what frightened me: it was as hungry as if it had got teeth, went chewing its way up into the air like a shark in Technicolor. A stone of blood settled over my heart, but smoke and flame hypnotised me, stood me there frozen and happy, rubbing my hands yet wanting to put it out, but not being able to any more than I could kill myself.

I didn't know fires could grow like that. My little ones had always gone out, shrunk up to black bits and flew into the air when I set half a breath against it. But then, that was only true with a scrap of newspaper on an asphalt yard. This was in a wood, and fire took to it like a kid to hot dinners: it was a sheet of red flame and grey smoke, a choking wall and curtain that scared me a bit, because I was back to life, as if big hands would reach out and grab me in for good and all. Like my uncle had said hell was—though I never believed him till now.

It was time to run.

I sped off like a rabbit, scratched and cindered as my ankles caught on thorns and sharp grass. The hammer-and-tongs of a fire-engine were a long way from me now, and I was a ragged-arsed thunderbolt suddenly tangled in a high bush, stuck like a press-stud that fought a path out, and went on again lit up and cursing. At the edge of the wood I slowed down, and halfway to the lane looked back, expecting to see a sheet of fire and smoke bending out over the trees with flags flying and claws sharp.

But nothing. I could have burst into a gallon of tears. Nothing: not a butterfly of smoke, not an ant of flame.

Maybe I'm too close to see, I thought. Or should I run back and

stoke up again, blow it and coax, pat and kick it into life? But I went on.

If the wood caught fire, as I still hoped, who'd get the fire-engines? And if anybody did would I hear and see them? Being as how I'd caused the fire I had to get miles away quick without being spotted, so how could I poke my nose in at the nearest copperbox and bawl out there was a fire in Snakey Wood and not risk getting sent to an Approved School for my good deed? I wished I'd thought of this already: but all I could hope for now was that some bloke at the local sawmill or a field-digger from the farm would twig things while I wasn't too far off and get the fire-engine on its way so's I could run and see it.

By the lane I turned, and there it was: no fire yet but a thin trail of smoke coming up like a wavy blue pole above the crowded trees. I'd expected it all to be like it was on the pictures, boiling away and me having to run for my life, with a yellow-orange carpet of flame snapdragging at my heels, but it just showed how different things were to what you expected. Not that I didn't know they always were, but it still came as a shock I don't mind admitting.

The wood was burning, which was a start, and though I couldn't see any flame yet I didn't wait for it either, but dodged under the hedgebottom and crossed the open field to the big outstanding arm-beam of a canal lock. I puffed and grunted to get it shut, then crept across on all fours—using it as a bridge—to the towing-path on the other side. Nobody saw me: a man was humped over the bank fishing a bit farther down, but he never even turned to see who was passing. Maybe he ain't got a licence to fish, I thought, and no more wants to be seen than I do —which I can easy understand.

The wind blew stronger and the sun still shone but I daren't look back towards my pet wood which I hoped by now was crackling away. Walking along I looked like a fed-up kid out for an airing who was too daft and useless to have been in mischief—but because it seemed as if butter wouldn't melt in my mouth didn't mean I hadn't set a fire off in which butter wouldn't stand an earthly. I didn't want anybody to twig owt though, as I walked up to the main road and into a world of people and traffic where I wasn't so noticeable any more.

Back along the canal far-off thick smoke was going up to the bubble-blue sky, black low down as if from an oilwell, but thinning a bit on top. It was burning all right, though people walking by didn't seem to think owt was amiss.

I sat on the bridge wall, unable to take my eyes off it, rattled a bit that people didn't turn to open their mouths and wonder

what I was looking at. I wanted to shout out, "Hey, missis, hey, mester, see that smoke? It's Snakey Wood on fire, and I done it"—but somehow the words wouldn't come, though God knows I remember wanting them to.

I started off towards home, one minute happy that I'd brought off my own big fire, and the next crippled by a rotten sadness I couldn't explain, hands in pockets as I walked farther and farther away from my column of fire and smoke that, if you think about it, should have made me the happiest kid in Radford.

From this changeable mood I was neither one thing nor the other as I went downhill towards the White Horse—almost home—having nothing else at my head but a shrill-whistled Al Jolson tune. Then into my ears and brain—through the last barbed-wire of my whistling—came the magic sound I'd longed all day to hear. The air went blue and electric, as it sometimes does before a terrible sheet-ripping thunderstorm, and cars at the crossroads stopped and waited, drivers winding their windows down to look out.

My mouth opened and I stared and stared, the only picture in my mind for the next few seconds being that of the last Bonfire Night but one, in which I'd wandered off on my own up Mitchell Street and come across the best fire I'd ever seen. It was already twice as high as any man, and impossible to stoke anything else on top. A pile of mattresses still had got to be burnt and a couple of big lads dragged them one at a time up on top of a chapel roof by whose side walls the fire had been lit. When all of the two dozen bug-eaten mattresses were stacked high on the slates, the lads swung each one out, perched up there like demons in the blaze of the rattling flames, and let them crash down one by one into the very middle of the red fire. Everybody said the church would go, but it didn't and when I saw that it wouldn't I walked away.

My eyes were open again on broad daylight, and from the top of the opposite hill sounded the bells I remembered hearing that very first time as a kid when downtown with Mam. But this time there were more bells than I'd ever heard; a big red engine, fresh out of the vast sheds of town and coming between the shops and pubs, shot the crossroads like a streak of iron lightning, all bells at full throttle so that two blokes talking outside the pub couldn't make themselves heard and stopped till it had gone by. But they still couldn't start talking again, because another engine was almost right behind.

My legs trembled and I thought my ears would fall away from my head. One of the two men looked so hard at me that his face swam, and I thought, What's he making himself go all blurred

like that for? but when my ankles became heavy as lead and my legs above them turned into feathers I knew it was *my* eyes swimming, that I was about to cave in again like I'd done that long time ago with Mam.

I took a step forward, screwing up my eyes and opening them, then held on the windowledge for a second, until I knew I'd be all right, and was able to stand another engine bursting in and out of my brain; then another. Four!

No sooner could I have shouted with joy, than I found it hard to stop myself letting the tears roll like wagons out of my eyes. I'd never seen four fire-engines before: the whole wood must be in flame from top to bottom I thought, and was sorry now I hadn't stayed close by to watch, wondering if I should go back, because I knew that even four engines wouldn't get a fire like that down before tonight or even later.

All that work and walking gone for nothing, I cursed, as another engine broke the record of the last one down the hill. I waved as it shot by, yet felt as if I'd had my fill of fire-engines for a long while. Six passed altogether. By this time I was sobbing, almost stone-dead and useless.

"What's up, kid?" one of the two men said to me.

"I'm frightened," I managed to blurt out.

He patted me on the shoulder: "There's no need o' that. The fire's miles away, up Wollaton somewhere, by the look on it. It wain't come down 'ere, so you needn't worry."

But I couldn't stop; it was as hard to dry up as it had been for me to start, and I went on heaving as if the end of the world was just around the corner.

"Do you live far?" he asked, but I couldn't tell him.

"I'm frightened," was all I said, and he didn't know what to do, wished by this time he'd left me alone.

"Well, you shouldn't be frightened. You're a big lad now."

I walked towards home along Eddison Road, my eyes drying up with every step, the great stone in my chest not jumping about so much. Six fire-engines made it a bigger day than Christmas, each red engine being better than a Santa Claus, so that even after my firebugging I never got over red being my favourite colour. When I went in through the scullery Dad looked happy, and such a thing was hard for me to understand.

"Come on, my owd duck," he said. I'd never seen him so fussy. "Where yo' bin all this time, yer young bogger? It's nearly teatime." He pulled a chair to the table for me: "'Ere y'are, get this down yer. Yer must be clambed to death"—took a plate of dinner out of the oven. "I thought you'd got lost or summat. Your mam's bin asking for you."

"Is she all right then, Dad?" I couldn't but ask.

"She's a bit better today," he grinned. "I expect we'll pull her through yet," which I was so glad to hear that it made me twice as hungry, as if the fire had burnt a hole in me as well as Snakey Wood, because a whole load of food was needed to fill it. Dad mashed tea, and I drank two mugs of that as well.

"I heard a lot of fire-engines going by just now," he said, sitting opposite me with a fag on and enjoying the sight of me eating. "Some poor bogger's getting burnt out by the sound of it."

Nobody knew who started that big fire all them years ago, and I know now that nobody will ever care, because Snakey Wood has gone for ever, even better flattened than by any fire: trees ripped up and soil pressed down by a housing estate that spread over it.

As it turned out I only burnt down half, according to the *Post*, and though everybody in our yard knew I was a bit of a firebug nobody thought for a minute it might have been me who set fire to Snakey Wood. Or if they did nowt was said.

In the next load of weeks and months I lost all interest in lighting fires; even the sound of a fire-engine rattling by didn't bother me as much as it had. Maybe it was strange, me giving it up all of a sudden like that, but I just hadn't got the heart to put match to paper, couldn't be bothered in fact, after Mam got better—which happened about the same time. I expect that big fire satisfied me, because whatever I did again would need to be bleddy huge to get more than six engines called out to it.

In any case there was something bigger than me to start fires, for after a couple of years came an air raid from the Germans and I remember getting out of the shelter at six one morning when the all clear had gone and standing in the middle of our street, seeing the whole sky red and orange over the other side of Nottingham—where, I heard later, two whole factories were up in flames. They burnt for days, and I wanted to go off and see them but Dad wouldn't let me.

People said that fifty fire-engines had to come before that was put out—spinning into Nottingham from Mansfield and Derby and all over everywhere.

And not long afterwards I was fourteen, went to work and started courting, so what was the use of fires after that?

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Of all the thirty-six alternatives, running away is the best.

Chinese Proverb

TIGER MOON

There was little place for sentiment in the jungle

BY DAVID WALKER

MY NAME is Peter Hill. I am a tea planter in the Darjeeling hills, but that March afternoon I was down in the jungles of West Bengal. I came out of the forest, went through a high gate, and unloaded my rifle. It was dusty and hot, and I was thinking of the swim that I would have. The swim would be fun, or a coolness and relief. But I was not here for fun. I was here to shoot a maneating tiger.

I walked up the drive to the whitewashed bungalow. It is a lovely place, that Karimpala. Even then, in the dryness of the year, the lawns were green, and spring water abundant. In princely days, Karimpala had been the country retreat of a Maharaja who liked to fence his companions in, or to fence his wild-life out, whichever it had been, or both. At any rate, a twenty-foot spiked railing had served some purpose, and still was tiger-proof, which made for peaceful sleep at present. Not that my sleep was peaceful in those days.

"Oh, damnation," I said, seeing a Land-Rover beside my jeep. They had asked me to come to deal with this animal, but they did not tell me that company would thrust itself on me at Karimpala. I did not want company, except the trusty, annoying company of old Fazl Haq, my bearer. This would be a planter, a forestry officer, a someone or other to have to talk to, drink with, and be bored by.

Whoever it was did not appear, and I went into my room at one end of the bungalow. "Who is it?" I asked Fazl Haq, putting my rifle in the rack.

"It is Kittery Sahib," he said. "And the sahib is sick."

"Oh," I said. That would be Martin Kittery, who managed a garden along the Dooars. I knew him slightly, and I knew that he had lost his wife a year ago abroad—in Canada, perhaps?—and that he had been flown to Calcutta for an operation this past Christmas.

We planters are a small league, in two divisions, more or less—the height-happy hills division, the sweaty-browed Dooars

division. A grapevine flourishes up and down, and to and fro. I was sorry about Kittery's troubles. Being a bachelor in good health, I had no troubles except my disagreeable self. ". . .What?"

"The Kittery Miss Sahib is with her father."

"Oh," I said.

"What was the shot, sahib?"

"A karkar," I said.

Fazl Haq showed no interest, knowing that the barking deer had not been hilalled by a true believer; hence the meat was denied to him. I sent him away, and changed into my swimming-trunks.

The Kittery girl would be in India to keep house for her father. I could envisage the dumpy debutante or faded member of the fishing fleet as I went down to the swimming pool. They hoped for husbands and, metaphorically speaking, bored the pants off me.

If you live alone with tea bushes in serried ranks on a near-precipice, usually in the clouds; and with the music of Johann Sebastian Bach; and with the dingy novels of the times; and with too much whisky at the Planters' Club on Saturday nights as routine safety valve, you tend to become the least bit misanthropic. It was time that I went home on leave, but now that my leave was overdue I did not want to go, could not endure the prospect of cosy England, nice relations. Some bachelors arrange things much more sensibly, but I was strictly celibate in principle and practice—even if my gaze would wander to a girl with a pretty bosom at her washing at the village tank. Reading this, you do not like me, and I do not blame you. I am telling the truth about myself as I was then.

I went down some steps of clean red rock, chiselled to a Maharaja's taste. "Hullo!" I called tactfully, in case the Kittery Miss Sahib, dumpy deb, should be sunbathing in the buff, or nearly.

She was swimming, not sunbathing. She did a racing turn at the other end, and crawled back. She could swim. She stood in the shallow end and shook her wet fair head, and saw me.

"Hullo," I said.

"Oh, hullo," she said.

Then I told her my name, and she told me hers. The conversation ceased as she came dripping up the steps in a black bathing suit. I swam. It was cool heaven. I am a damned bad swimmer, never even learnt the crawl. "Wonderful!" I said, with a hearty enthusiasm quite unlike me at that epoch.

"This is the loveliest place in West Bengal, I always think," she said. Which meant either that she was not newly out from

home, or that she had been here at other times when she was younger—perhaps as a child, for she was young.

To you, with so many swimming pools of azure blue, the Karimpala pool might not seem lovely. But charms are comparative, and the cool clear water in the clean red rock was a rare loveliness in dusty India. Yes, charms are comparative, and I suppose that if you set Yvonne Kittery down, or I mean asked her to set herself down, at Cannes, Montego Bay, Hot Springs, or somewhere, she would be neutralised somewhat to be just another one. But here she was a knockout, a humdinger, a voluptuous pearl or golden dish such as made that thought of mine about a dumpy deb seem lèse majesté. "I beg your pardon?"

"You're the man who has come to kill tigers?" she asked, or in a way asserted. "Kill" sounded odd. People talk about shooting tigers, not killing them.

"I've come to try for the maneater here," I said.

"I heard a shot this afternoon," she said. She looked at me and away. "Was that you?"

I was wrong about Cannes, Montego Bay, Hot Springs, or somewhere. You would see faces with character, but not a face like this—shadowed, haunted, I can't describe the haunt of beauty in that face.

"I shot a barking deer," I said.

"Oh no!" she said. Her eyes were the blue of delft. "Not a barking deer! They're such charming small brown things."

"And good to eat," I said.

It was true that the karkar, the barking deer, was perhaps the most endearing creature of the forest. And it was true that I had felt some regret after shooting the karkar this afternoon. But a man must have meat, unless he is a vegetarian. So I was nettled at this stranger's disapproval, in no mood to make excuses, to seem sorry, to agree that they were charming small brown things, a pity to have to kill them, yes.

We did not speak again until my annoyance ebbed, and then I said, "Your father—I'm sorry to hear he isn't better yet."

"Worse, I'm afraid," she said, and turned to me. Although I was on the road to being a curmudgeon at the unripe age of thirty-one, I could sometimes show sympathy. "I thought he would like to come just once again to Karimpala. We often did when I was small."

Yvonne Kittery traced a pattern with a finger on the rock. There was grace in any small action of hers, and there was a wonderful lulling softness in her speech, a hint of another language too. I had never heard a voice like that. "But Daddy is

too ill," she said. "And I think he remembers my mother too much here. I was wrong as usual, thinking of myself."

"Never mind," I said, with a thought about death as companion to her youth. It was unfair—that was the word for it, unfair.

I thought she might say more, but she changed the subject back to tigers, or escaped the subject back to tigers. I did not know. "But why come here?" she said. "The maneater isn't at Karimpala."

"There have been four kills to the east," I said, "and five to the west, and two in the foothills to the north, and all within twelve miles of one another. A lame tiger was driven off a woman's body. A lame tiger has been seen in the Karimpala jungle. It adds up."

"Many tigers are lame," she said. "I don't see it adding up at all." And then she said, with an edge of mockery or disparagement, "Do you kill tigers for fun, or for the thrill of it, or what?"

"I shoot maneaters because they have to be destroyed," I said. "Would you quarrel with that?"

"No," she said. "But I would expect that the Nimrod gratifies his ego."

"I can think of easier and pleasanter ways to gratify the Nimrod's ego." Which was true, for taking on maneaters is a dangerous, often a disgusting business. But was it altogether true? Did I not, in fact, work off my grudge against myself, my dissatisfaction with myself? Had the thing not become an obsession to be soothed in danger until it grew to nag again?

"You should try it," I said, which was a childish petulance to a girl of twenty-one or -two.

"Thanks very much," she said. "But I don't enjoy slaughtering things."

She stood then quickly and dived, and I watched her swim away across the pool at Karimpala, the lazy flutter of the legs, the long arms scything, fair hair trailing, to turn at the other end. She came back and stood waist-deep below me.

"I'm sorry I was rude," she said. "I'm in such a muddle about everything." She laughed up at me, and perhaps at herself. How disarming, how charming to see carefree youth in her face; but the haunt of unhappiness returned.

It disturbed me, and I went swimming, breaststroke. Then I floated on my back.

It was that last hour of the Indian day when the light is kindly, and green parakeets fly in to roost. I watched them passing overhead, and then I climbed out of the pool to let the late sun dry

me off. Her face was tilted to the hurtling, crying parakeets, and she was smiling.

But now I heard a high hubbub of voices, and the deeper voice of Fazl Haq. I listened a short time, a few seconds, enough to know the detail of the news that those frenetic voices had already told me.

"A boy has been killed," I said to Yvonne Kittery, who had said that the killing of maneaters gratified my Nimrod's ego; but she did not know the price I paid, the fear I felt, the dread excitement once again. "At a village three miles west," I said. "I must hurry."

"I told you it wasn't at Karimpala."

"You don't know what you're talking about," I said irritably.

But as I ran I wondered why this girl was so concerned to deny that the maneater used the deep jungle of Karimpala as a base from which to conduct operations. The thing was obvious. One glance at the X's of death marked on a map was enough to tell a knowledgeable person. But she denied the possibility. It was peculiar.

That night I sat in the crotch of a tree above the remains of a small boy's body. I sat alone through the setting of the moon, with the dark life of the jungle all that night. But the tiger did not come. The people of the village came soon after sunrise, beating drums. They would burn what was left of the tiger's kill.

I went back to Karimpala to sleep a few hours through the heat of day, and then to plan further against the brute. Do you remember Emerson?

If the red slayer think he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again.

That inscrutable verse was with me in the forest, snatches of it with me in my sleep; and once I heard her say it in her wonderful soft voice. I could have sworn that Yvonne said it all to me, awake now on my charpoy on the verandah at Karimpala. But she was not there in the shadows in the moonlit night.

Three days passed, and the tiger did not kill again.

"Sahib!" said old Fazl Haq, who had been my father's bearer. There has been a soldier Hill, or a planter Hill, or an administrator Hill in India since Company times, two hundred years. And now India was free, yet still mine to possess and be possessed by—the same testy love affair for me as for those others, dead and buried. "Sahib!" the inevitable preliminary

to his pleading with me about this obsession—kill the tiger or be killed. It had grown stronger in my solitary years, but now at Karimpala with the girl, her sick father, I was possessed.

"Do shut up, Fazl," I said in English.

He went away muttering, and I sat alone until I heard a few light steps on the verandah, the scuff of a chair on concrete. To go or not to go? But of course to go, as the moth goes to the lamp. I took a long thin drink of whisky in my hand. "Hullo," I said.

"Oh, hi," she said. She wore a blouse, men's trousers of khaki drill. She had a figure to look well in any gunny sack or anything at all, or next to nothing in a bathing suit. Her hair was straight from swimming, and brushed to glisten in the moon, which was three nights' stronger than on the night I spent up a tree. "It's a lovely night," she said quietly to me.

"All the March nights are lovely," I said.

Sometimes we were polite together; a few times we laughed together. We talked off and on, as preoccupied people will. But her real thoughts were closed to me. I saw her at breakfast when I came back from the jungle. Most of the day she was with her father, to whom her devotion was true and touching. She swam in the afternoons. We met for this hour after dinner on the nights that I was in camp.

But one evening just before dusk I met her on the watercourse that ran down from the foothills. I came on her round an island of the dry river bed, alone and unarmed in maneater country. My nerves were none too steely, and I lost my temper, called her a little idiot, for such headstrong madness; at which she told me to mind my own damned business. It was a hot exchange, but when I threatened that either she stayed within the Maharaja's fence or I would speak to her father, she yielded angrily and resentfully at once.

She had a blind unreasoning bug about killing things; hence a strong dislike for that aspect of me. But she did not seem to dislike being with me. As for myself, after four days I was baffled by her and entranced by her. The tiger, the girl—my two unknowns. Life was a slightly blissful and hellish confusion, if you know what I mean.

"Sorry," I said. "I didn't hear."

"Any developments?" she asked, still looking at me; and then turning to the jungle in the moon.

"It's four nights since the boy was killed," I said. "We ought to get a kill tonight if the tiger is here again, and I think it is. I have eight young buffaloes tied up, the easiest kills extant."

"Poor young buffaloes," she said. "So cruel."

I began to speak, but she broke in, " Don't bother to tell me about being cruel to be kind, the greater good, the end justifies, and so on. The maneater isn't at Karimpala. So you will kill the wrong tiger. But that will be fun for you, anyway."

" If you would confine yourself to expressing opinions about such small things as you know about," I said, " you would do better, and perhaps be less insulting."

That silenced her.

Now a brainfever bird was calling in the garden of the bungalow at Karimpala. It called for heat—more heat tomorrow and the next day, into April, into May, for ever, mounting every night. I listened to it. She listened to it. One cannot but listen to the brainfever bird.

" You're going to die," she said. " You're going to die, up and up and on and on to stop and die." She shivered.

You're going to die are the European words for the song or call of that bird. But about whose death did Yvonne shiver?

" Shall I get you a drink? " I said.

" I would love one, Peter."

I brought that for her, and her hand touched mine as she took the glass. Her cool supple hand enclosed the glass above my hand for a few seconds, three or five, until she pulled at the glass, and I let go. " A tug of war," she said to me after the first touch of our hands. But her smile, quick and aware, was gone. " Oh dear," she said, " things are so muddled." The brainfever bird was calling.

" ' Pee-kahan? ' they say in Hindustani. ' Where is my love? ' are their words for the brainfever bird."

" I didn't know," she said. " ' Where is my love? ' That's rather nice. And your love is waiting in the jungle to be killed."

She had been so gentle, and now she needled me again in that most gentle voice. Why? " I would like to be with you away from here," I said. " I would like to hear you talk all night, on deck in the Indian Ocean—yes, I think so." Thus I told her.

" And no damned tigers," I said.

" You would never be happy without damned tigers," she said. She went away.

I sat on alone, listening to the murmur in her father's room; and then Yvonne's voice—louder, petulant, and still melodious. " All right, Daddy," she said along there. " I promised, didn't I? Good night then, darling."

She came back to stand, profiled against the jungle in the moon. The brainfever bird was having a rest. The leaves were stirring. Brainfever started up again. " That blasted bird," she said.

" India," I said.

"Yes," Yvonne said. "And sometimes I hate it. Good night, Peter Hill."

I was a long time finding sleep. "Good night, Peter Hill." And: "If the red slayer think he slays . . ." And things I could wish her to say to me; but she had not said them. "Your love is waiting in the jungle to be killed," she said to me. And: "You would never be happy without damned tigers.—They know not well the subtle ways I keep, and pass, and turn again.—Good night, Peter Hill."

The tiger did not kill a buffalo that night, but it left tracks in the Karimpala jungle. Now I was sure. I was going to tell Yvonne at breakfast, and did not quite bring myself to dare, Peter Hill being the enemy that morning.

I made up an hour's sleep after lunch, and then was awake to see her walking to the swimming pool. I watched her go, as some Peeping Tom, or some tiger lurks to follow to share the pool for half an hour before apology-for-tiger must seek real tiger in the jungle yet again. But Kittery's bearer brought the salaams of the Bara Sahib, and I went to see him.

Martin Kittery had the look of death—the pinch, the resignation. Each morning he walked to the gate and back, and managed a slice of toast, a mouthful of egg, nauseated by the drugs that eased his pain. He was a stout chap, Martin Kittery.

Now he sat in bed, the punkah creaking back and forth. He told me a story. It was a strange story, I suppose, although there have been many like it, many stranger stories of India and Africa, of all our world.

"You are sure?" he said.

"No doubt now at all," I said. "I took a plaster of paris cast of the off-fore pugmark in mud where that boy was killed the other day. I took another cast in mud this morning at a waterhole in the Karimpala forest. It is as good evidence as a human thumb-print. What do you fear?" I said to him.

"Has Yvonne been into the jungle? She promised me not to go, but I see in her face . . . Has she, Peter, do you know?"

"Not to my knowledge," I lied, to spare him. "Go on, sir."

"She is brooding. I see a secret something haunt her—her mother gone, me on my way. A reaching back? An expiation or a longing, I don't know. I know nothing of humanity, and least of the depths of Yvonne, her mother's daughter. A horror of killing, too much thought of death?"

He paused. They had given him six months, and soon he would sail home to England. His voice was stronger after resting. "I am afraid," he said. "I am afraid of what might happen if

it should turn out that the maneater of Karimpala is Sher Bahadur, her mother's pet tiger cub. I am afraid of what may happen when you kill that animal, as kill it you must. Watch her, Peter! Help us."

"I will try, sir," I said. "If she trusted me more, and disliked me less, it might be easier."

He smiled. "My dear boy," he said. "That she trusts you against her wishes may be at least part of her troubles. That she dislikes what you are here to do is another part. That a woman is provoked more by her likes than her dislikes might be still another part."

"I must go," I said, hotching more than ever to be back up there.

"Peter," he said. "Forgive me for preaching and indulging in self-pity—but if I had your youth and strength again, I would be thinking of the joy of life. Then what would I have to take out on tigers?"

"Thank you, sir," I said, and left him.

I was ashamed. Here at Karimpala I had found at last the painful joy of life. But here at Karimpala, which she had called the loveliest place in West Bengal, the tiger—her tiger?—waited for me.

We sat until eleven, the moon nearly full, that bird in the garden. To be a really provoking, cruel man, I thought of suggesting that I fetch my little gun and rid us of that blasted bird. She needed to be needled, have her leg pulled, just as much as I did. But no, I was the cunning lover boy. I made her talk about herself, a lullaby to which I listened, offering cues to more delight. "And music, Yvonne? Tell me what you like."

She liked Sibelius and hotcha stuff. She liked Groucho and the ballet. She had been madly in love with a ski instructor at Mont Tremblant.

Her mother was a French Canadian, and Yvonne had gone to school in Cánada, had lived at her grandfather's south shore seigneury by the St. Lawrence. Bears, moose, and deer? Well, of course.

She talked on and I listened.

"I wish you were always so restful as this," she said to me. Yes, I seemed restful, listening to her. But I was plotting. Soon now I would woo her to the subject, to pour her troubled heart out, tell me.

But a sound shocked the jungle into silence, shocked the brain-fever bird. Her head turned instantly. Her head turned always to the smallest jungle sounds. But this was no small sound. A tiger had coughed, a short deep *wooff*.

The noise filled the jungle, and was gone.

"One of my buffaloes, I suppose," I said. "I should have sat up."

I had stayed in camp tonight for the duty, the pleasure, the excuse of keeping an eye on Yvonne. Besides, it is usually a waste of time to hunt the needle in the haystack. Wait until the tiger-needle has been drawn to the magnet of a kill. And even then the chance of a maneater coming back is small. Familiarity breeds contempt, yet an inordinate wariness. "I should have sat up tonight," I said again.

"Sat up to shoot the wrong one." The gramophone record in the golden voice.

"There is always that chance," I said warily. "But the only tracks I have seen at Karimpala belong to a lame tiger. And now I have positive proof. Let me show you my plaster casts."

This was what I had planned to do when I had won her sympathy, but the mood was shattered. There was some talk in the jungle now again—a cheetah called alarm. The brainfever bird was at it: You're going to die. Who's going to die? Where is my love? Where is the frenzy of my love? "Let me show you," I said.

"No!" she cried at me. "No, no, no!" She went into her room.

I lay awake. There is a time when the coolness comes on a night in March, and you lean forward for the folded blanket. That time came, but I did not sleep. The moon dipped round to make a flimsy room of my mosquito net. I feared to sleep. I watched the wise or foolish moon until I shut my eyes against it, and I dozed.

I heard a sound. It was a soft metallic shutting of the gate. I broke my scorpion rules and ran barefooted round the verandah to her room—she slept inside. But the mosquito net was not tucked in, and Yvonne's bed was empty. . .

I walked up the middle of the watercourse. It was not as light as day, but here on the dry white sand of the river bed it was light enough to see the smudged imprint of a woman's shoe. Should I call, and call the tiger too? Should I call, "*Yvonne! Where are you? Get up a tree at once.*" But the tiger might hear me, and she might not. Or she might hear me, and hide from her pursuer, her pursuers.

So I went silently up the middle. It was wide here—twenty yards to either bank, open ground behind my sensitive back, bare sand and stones to a bend ahead. I walked up the moonland of the watercourse. When the first man walks the moonlands of the moon, he may walk in such a place; but a dead place, not a

place where life and love are quarry—that is, unless man takes his warring madness to the moon.

I came to the narrow bend in the dry river's course. On my right was a rock, head high. Round that and beyond it, the first of my young buffaloes was tied up. If the tiger had killed this buffalo for easy meat . . . *If the red slayer think he slays.*

Ahead was a wooded island between two channels. On the left, the bank was undercut, above it scrub growth, and in that one large tree, a banyan, monster of flying root and twisting vine. I paused. Nothing moved at all. There was no sound. I could see no tracks.

I had the feeling, the foreboding, certainty and essence. Here was my time again, I knew. There had been other such times; but then I had not glimpsed the prize of life to make life precious. I must go round that rock, and there the tiger would be waiting.

I kept close to it, my rifle in both hands, muzzles to the left. I went on round the rock. Round and round the rugged rock, the moon-mad rascal . . .

"Behind you, Peter!"

I had heard nothing before that high wild cry. But now as I swung, the tiger coughed, and my world was blasted in the sound, the hate, the charging tiger. I fell back as I turned. The shot went off. The rifle was torn from me. I saw the rifle fly, and the lame tiger gallop. I heard the bullet ricochet, whine harmlessly away above the Karimpala forest.

Then I was on the rock, my lowly citadel. The tiger—where was the tiger? "Where are you, Yvonne?" I said, and the tiger snarled from the wooded island in the river bed.

"I'm here," said Yvonne Kittery, and the tiger snarled.

A night breeze stirred the leaves of the banyan tree, whence her voice had come. My sweat was colder in the breeze. The moonlight gleamed a little on my .423, one barrel loaded at the moment. The rifle lay on sand—undamaged, was my guess—in the middle of a roughly equilateral triangle—Yvonne, tiger, me.

She was fairly safe, and the tiger was entirely safe, and I was pinned at the tiger's pleasure. It could stand on hindlegs and use a good paw to swipe me off. The young buffalo was still alive, straining against its tether, terrified. So cruel to tie them up for slaughter bait.

"Oh, Sher Bahadur!" she called softly, and the tiger growled. "Oh, Sher Bahadur, listen to me!" Listen to my voice, Brave Tiger!

"You know, Peter," Martin Kittery had said, "Louise, my wife, had an astounding power with animals, with any animals.

It was her voice, I think, and something more—a sympathy, or empathy might be a better word. One person in a thousand or a million has it.

". . . Sher Bahadur was three-quarters grown, perfectly docile, half giant puppy, giant kitten. But our people in the tea-garden were scared stiff of him. In the end I said he had to go, because there always must come the blooding time. The Calcutta Zoo? Louise would rather have had him shot, she said; and such an idea was unbearable to her. And so, flatly against my wishes, she went to the Maharaja—she was wilful and wonderful, just like Yvonne . . .

" We brought him secretly in the tea-garden lorry. I remember her talking to him all the way. I can see her and young Yvonne walk with Sher Bahadur up that watercourse in the afternoon to say good-bye. But it was not quite adieu, I think, because in the first years afterwards, when we came here, Louise would go alone into the jungle. I never asked her, and she did not tell me. Yvonne was away in Canada almost all those years until she lost her mother."

" How many years ago did you bring the tiger to Karimpala? " I asked this man of fortitude.

" Let me see," he said. " Yvonne was eight—yes, fourteen years ago."

Now the tiger would be fifteen or so—but a tiger's lifespan is thirty years.

Yvonne was talking. She talked as lovers talk when lovers are at peace between the fevers that are also love. I moved on my rock. The tiger growled.

" Be quiet, Sher Bahadur," Yvonne said. " Now listen to me." She talked on, the soothing benefaction of that voice, her mother's voice. " Do you remember how she used to tell you stories of a tiger lying in the sun, the sun so warm, the snow so cold to make a tiger's fur grow thick? Do you remember, Sher Bahadur? Do you remember the one about Tiger floating down a river by canoe? " The jungle was quiet, only moonlit madness, Yvonne talking in the jungle. And now another sound: the tiger was puffing through its lips, bubbling puffs of tiger pleasure, friendship.

" Sher Bahadur, you keep still. When I move, keep still, remember, Peter, keep quite still." Her voice had not changed from the flowing, soothing rhythm of a lazy river, tiger by canoe downriver.

The tiger still puffed pleasure through its lips, and Yvonne climbed slowly down, and she was talking, talking now of snow

again, of cool delicious snow where tigers came from long ago. She talked of that here in the sandy watercourse where snow would never lie so long as men and tigers lived; and the tiger bubbled pleasure out of sight, and Yvonne strolled across the sand, and bent for the rifle, talking still, a few yards from that puffing sound of tiger happy, man-killer lulled to peace. She strolled on down to me, as lovely as a lovely girl alone with smiling thoughts in Bond Street, still telling tiger stories in her mother's voice, soft, limpid, and beguiling. But the tiger puffed no more.

I saw a stirring, bunching in undergrowth.

"Now run!" I commanded Yvonne, and she ran.

I bent down for the barrels, grasped them. I shot the lame tiger between the eyes, and it thudded to thrash against the rock below me. I do so many things so badly, and I always will; but I was a damned good shot in my shooting days. I put in two more shells for the coups de grâce that were not necessary. I looked at the body of Sher Bahadur. There was an old wound in the elbow of the off-foreleg. Had that turned him to hunt men? Or had it been the softness, kindness, a gentle voice from long ago? Never pamper the bull calf, lest it grow to be the killer bull.

Her father had not asked her mother whether she talked to Sher Bahadur in the Karimpala jungle in the after years. I did not ask Yvonne what had brought her here. I thought I knew, in so far as a man may understand the maelstrom of such things.

I laid my rifle down and comforted my love, and soon we kissed with passion in the moonland of the watercourse at Karimpala, for love is warmed by danger done.

Then, being Yvonne, she insisted that we collect my eight young water buffaloes from here and there about Karimpala. And that we did, and the creatures of man's whim followed us quite skittishly to live another while.

The buffaloes browsed at the gate. We walked up the garden where the brainfever bird was calling. "You're going to die," it called for some of us, for all of us some time. "Where is my love?" it called for all of us. "Here is my love," it called for those of us so blessed.

We went hand in hand to the bungalow where Fazl Haq was waiting. The old man smiled. He raised his hand in a kind of blessing, and said to me, "Now the sahib will learn a father's wisdom."

We swam in the pool as the moon went down. It is a lovely place, that Karimpala, yours or mine.

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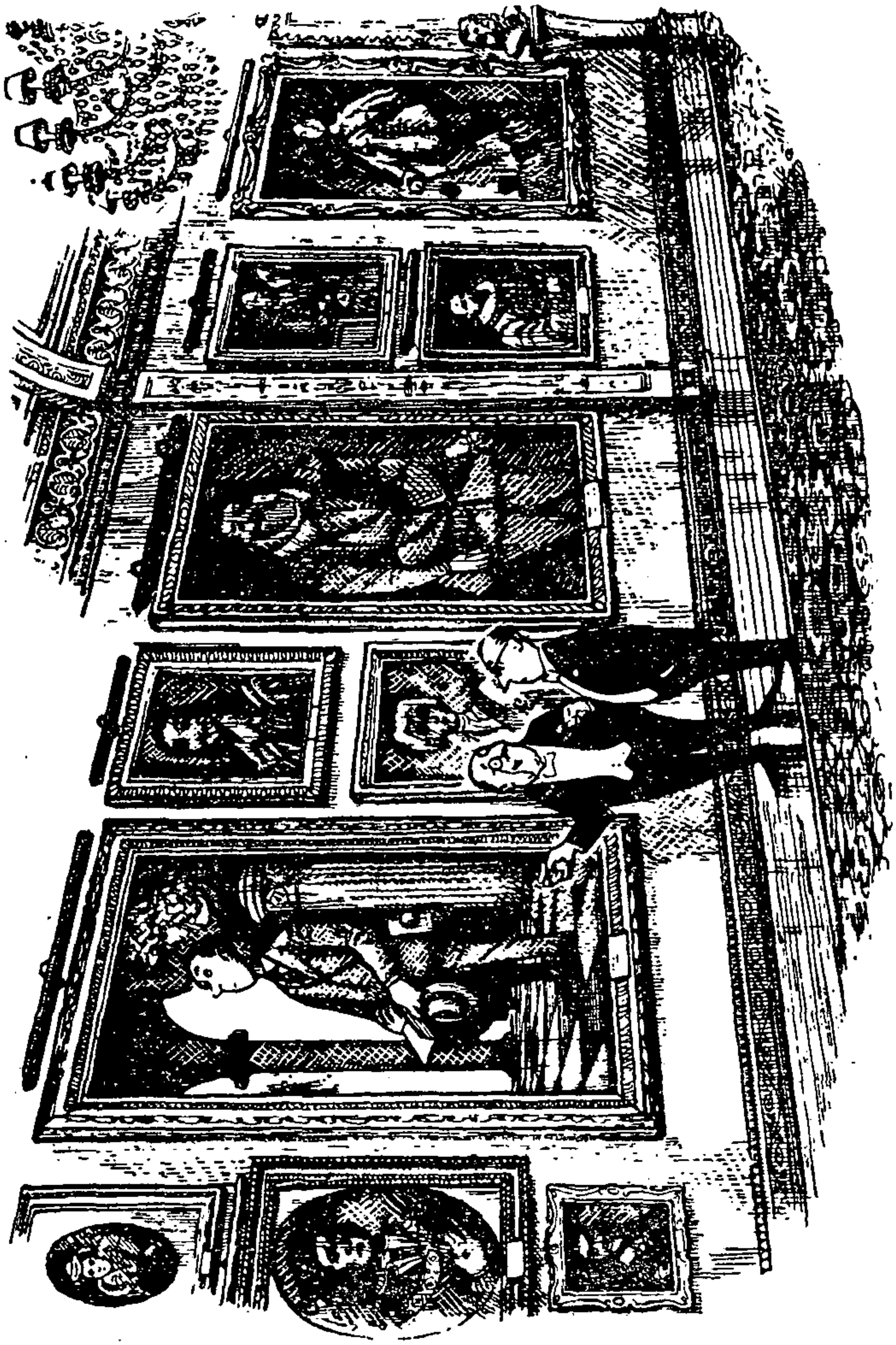
THELWELL
IN ARGOSY

". . . and this is the present duke . . ."



"That's my favourite—our one hundred thousandth visitor."

"It seems a far cry from the more leisurely days . . .

. . . to the frenzied rush of today."

Feast of Makassang

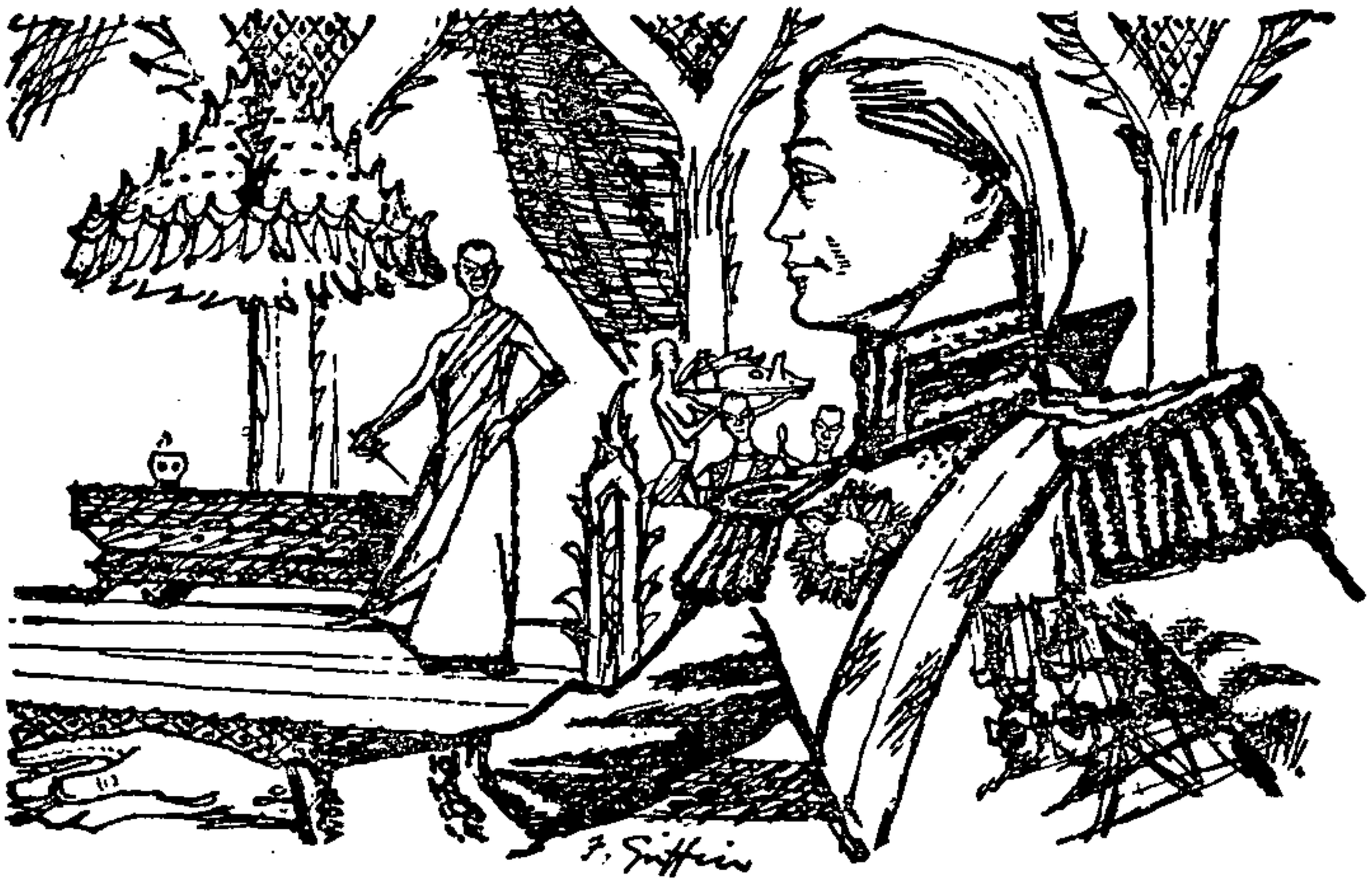
In Java seas, defying the crew of his ship, pirate-adventurer Richard Marriott has stayed ashore to crush rebellion for the Rajah of Makassang

THERE was no doubt that the occasion was a fine one. Though Richard-Marriott had by now become used to the splendours of the Sun Palace of the Rajah of Makassang, the first banquet he had attended on his arrival was no more than a poorhouse supper when matched with the barbaric magnificence of this night's entertainment.

There must have been fifty at the high table alone, and in the body of the room upwards of a thousand guests ate, drank, and took their ease. There were also many strange faces among Richard's immediate neighbours; by their bearing and the number of their personal servants, they were men of importance. Their attendance intrigued him, and he leaned across to address a query to Amin Bulong, the Commander-in-Chief seated near by.

The old man, busy as usual with the pleasure of eating, shrugged his shoulders as he answered, " Every chief in Makassang is here tonight! "

" Why is that? "



from

Nicholas Monsarrat's

The White Rajah

"They have been summoned," said Amin Bulong briefly, and went on to speak of what was clearly uppermost in his mind: the dish of gulls' eggs spiced with cloves and nutmegs, which had just been laid before him.

These strangers—most of them old men, grave-faced, and withdrawn—had on their arrival greeted Richard with respect. They seemed to know him already, or to have heard of his deeds and to acknowledge his consequence without reservation. Many of them bore the same badge of office, superimposed on their other regalia: a broad sash of purple silk worn across one shoulder and held in place by a jewelled emblem.

When he asked Amin Bulong for enlightenment, the answer was short and pointed.

"They are members of the Council of State," said Amin Bulong. Then he motioned to the dish of gulls' eggs, nestling in their bed of scarlet sea-moss. "Help yourself," he said with very good humour, "before it is too late."

A second oddity was the presence of Selang Aro. The sour-visaged High Priest of the Anapuri sat in a place of honour, almost at the centre of the table. By turning slightly, Richard had the other man's face in full view—and the full view was not reassuring. Above the saffron robes and the severe black collar which was

his sole mark of rank, the face of Selang Aro reflected nothing save a supercilious disengagement. He might be there, in the unwilling flesh, but in the spirit he was many worlds away.

Richard wondered why he had been invited at all, and why he had consented to attend—unless it were a matter of command. His air of reserved power, of being preoccupied with higher matters, made him an uncomfortable neighbour. He ate nothing. He spoke to no one. He was simply present—a dry skeleton at a profane feast.

Certainly the entertainment was not designed to accord with priestly withdrawal from the world of the flesh. There were no women yet to be seen, but every other focus of appetite was indulged to the full. The whole audience chamber had been newly hung with tapestries, which Richard recognised as coming from the treasure vault below. The wine flowed in rivers; the dishes were of an extraordinary variety, ranging from such gross offerings as a wild pig roasted whole, standing upright on a golden salver four feet across, to tiny brilliant fish not much bigger than a finger's length, seeming to swim in their bowls of scented oil.

The flickering torchlight fell on a riot of colour and movement. Servants brought new dishes in endless relay; beakers of wine circled the room without pause. There were tumblers in multi-coloured finery with bells on their ankles, and magicians whose deft hands conjured tendrils and wreaths of flowers from the very air.

An Indian with a filthy matted beard charmed a snake from its basket with such sweet notes upon the pipe that it seemed no miracle to see a lowly serpent unable to resist them. A pair of naked wrestlers, both larded with a thick covering of pig's fat, slid in and out of each other's grip like great flopping fish, while roars of laughter rang through the room at their efforts to subdue one another. Their contest ended with a wild chase among the tables, in which many others joined, until the whole room seemed rendered helpless with laughter.

Then the musicians took up their task once more, filling the air with an insistent yet melodious beauty; and the company fell to eating again and pledging each other in wine and bowing towards the high table, restoring to the banquet the sense of a great occasion.

The Rajah was in fine spirits. He had placed Richard on his left hand, and saw that he was plied with food and drink; the skull-cup constantly passed between them. But he would say nothing of the purpose of the evening—if it had a purpose, beyond this bountiful enjoyment. When Richard expressed his curiosity, the Rajah answered him only in vague terms.

"Let us say that we are celebrating the victory, Captain Marriott. Your victory."

Richard looked round him at the fantastic scene. "It was not worth so much honour," he protested.

"It was worth so much to me. Come—let us drink a toast to victory, and to the future."

Richard, looking over the rim of the skull-cup as he drank in

Monsarrat . . .

Nicholas (*The Cruel Sea : seven million copies*) Monsarrat is the latest enthusiast for the Robinson Crusoe life, luxury edition. On his tiny island in the St. Lawrence river, household chores are reduced to a minimum. He shops from his high-powered speedboat, Souffle, cooks from eight basic recipes including Spanish Omelet Sauerkraut, exotic variations on the Irish stew, and casseroled pike, and apart from writing for five or six hours a day, spends the rest of his time fishing, thinking, reading, and listening to music. Idyllic. Almost.

Only complication : taking a bath. In order to do this, he has to go to the mainland to get the petrol to start the motor that starts the water supply rolling, chop the wood, collect the paper and start the fire that somewhere in the all too smoky future may provide the bath.

It's a womanless existence but he freely admits he's in love with his typewriter. This is understandable. It has, after all, brought him the simple life plus champagne, Havana cigars, a Rolls, and, of course, munificent figures from his film rights.

response, suddenly found that he was gazing directly into the eyes of Selang Aro, seated a few feet away. The High Priest's expression, though veiled, was unmistakable; there was envy in it, and bitterness, and something akin to hatred.

Taken aback, Richard sought to ease the moment with a friendly exchange of words.

Still holding the skull-cup, he leaned across towards Selang Aro and said with all the politeness he could muster, " I hope you are finding amusement here tonight."

As if one curtain were succeeding another, Selang Aro's face changed swiftly from its cast of malevolence to a customary sour disdain. Though he bent forward with an equal formality, his tone was cold as he answered, " Such occasions as this are far removed from the life of the Anapuri."

" But you must agree that it is a great celebration," said Richard carefully.

" No doubt." Selang Aro's thin smile was devoid of humour. " I understand that you will be full of honours before the evening is out."

" I know nothing of that."

" Yet I hope," said Selang Aro, disregarding entirely Richard's answer, " that you will not receive more honours than one man can safely bear."

" You talk in riddles," said Richard coldly.

Selang Aro lowered his head, masking his eyes completely. His voice was scarcely above a whisper as he said, " Such honours can be heavy enough to kill a man."

Richard was about to probe further when his attention was distracted. It seemed that the long feasting was at last done; there was now a general movement at the centre of the floor as the tables were cleared away and the guests withdrew to steps and porticoes flanking the audience chamber. He turned to speak to the Rajah. " Is there dancing tonight, Your Highness? "

" Certainly," answered the Rajah. " There will be a special dance in your honour. We call it the Dance of Heavenly Exaltation. It is our rarest entertainment."

Richard hesitated, at a loss how to phrase his next question. But he had to know the answer.

" Will Her Highness the Princess Sunara be dancing also? "

" Certainly," said the Rajah again. He turned on Richard a bland look of innocence which, if it were assumed, was well done indeed. " On this night of all nights she could not fail to take her appointed place, could she? "

Richard's peace of mind was unequal to the moment; he experienced a sudden pang of foreboding mixed with a wild jealousy. He remembered the first time that Sunara had danced and her dress which had so fired and pricked his imagination. Would she dance thus again, before a thousand pairs of eyes? It had not mattered at all, on that first occasion; he had been a stranger then, free of thought, careless of glance, tasting all delights with equal appetite; but now all was changed. There were things that a man, a lover, could scarcely bear to witness . . .

He waited in silence, sick at heart, as the dancing floor was cleared, and the musicians, after a pause to allow quiet to fall, began the first notes of a new melody.

Richard, no connoisseur of the intricacies of the dance, found himself unable to distinguish the dance of Heavenly Exaltation from the earlier dance of the Virgin Sacrifice; to his heavy heart, they both seemed designed to culminate in the appearance of Princess Sunara, in circumstances which he remembered far too vividly for his composure.

He watched in brooding anticipation as the line of twenty slave-girls, diaphanously clothed, embarked on their graceful measure; he found himself listening with dread to the music as it worked

towards its climax, and the beat of the gong which must herald her appearance. It was shameful that she should be thus exposed to the public gaze . . .

Turning slightly, while the music rose to its appointed crescendo, he saw that the Rajah was watching him; there was in the old man's glance a hint of sly mockery which in Richard's present mood seemed intolerable.

He dropped his glance, determined not to feed this unseemly curiosity. The music ceased; the iron beat of the gong reverberated throughout the room; and at that, perforce, he raised his eyes again as Sunara made her entrance, gliding through the curtained portico at the far end of the chamber.

Instantly his spirits leapt upwards to a peak of love and longing. For Sunara was, after all, unrevealed; indeed, she was clothed from head to foot in a simple, even severe dress of yellow silk, so modest and so demure that it might have been designed to send him a direct message of reassurance. She looked beautiful, and remote, and set apart from the gross world; the "heavenly exaltation" of the dance could only be the exaltation of purity.

Sunara ended her dance with a bow to her father; then, instead of withdrawing, she began to ascend the small flight of steps which led to the high table and the ivory throne. As she drew near her eyes sought Richard's in candid eagerness to restore their loving communion; her look of warming happiness was not lost upon those who stood at the high table awaiting her approach, and there was a murmur of interest which spread gradually, like a lapping wave, until it had reached the far corners of the room.

When finally Sunara stood at his side, and Richard bowed low over her hand, the public concentration on their meeting was obvious. Many smiles were bent upon them; goodwill seemed to flow in their direction; there was even some hand-clapping from the humbler parts of the room. Only Selang Aro, remote and grudging, remained apart, not choosing to bless with his approval this evidence of a romantic confederacy.

On this formal occasion there were certain presentations to be made; Sunara moved gracefully within the circle of the Council of State and the high table, greeting her father's old counsellors with a blending of the regal and the feminine which was a delight to see. But her concentration, to a discerning or a loving eye, was not perfect; at times, as she made her progress from guest to guest, her glance turned towards Richard—over the broad shoulder of a stranger, in a small space between one man and another—and in her glance, the recollection of last night's tempestuous intimacy was lovingly apparent. To receive this private message in the midst of such mannered exchanges was more exciting than any direct communication could have been.

Presently, her duty done, she rejoined Richard and her father, and took her seat on the smaller throne which her maids of honour now brought forward.

"You danced well, my daughter," the Rajah told her. "As

always, it was a pleasure to watch you. Don't you agree with me, Captain Marriott?"

"A great pleasure," answered Richard.

"It seemed to me," said the Rajah, "that you appeared nervous before the Princess made her appearance."

"Nervous?" said Sunara, with seeming surprise. "Now why should that be?"

"I cannot imagine," said her father.

"Perhaps it was anticipation," said Richard. He did not mind the raillery; he was happier at that moment than at any time he could remember. "One is inclined to suffer when someone personally known is to make a public appearance."

"I noted the suffering," said the Rajah, "but I could not guess its cause."

"You have a most handsome dress, Princess," said Richard.

"Thank you, Captain Marriott."

"It has a certain merit," said the Rajah. "Even to a father's eye."

"The merit of great beauty."

"And of great modesty?"

Richard nodded. "That, also."

Sunara looked from one to the other. "Modesty is a matter of behaviour," she said, affecting a severe tone. "It needs no dress to aid it."

"Perhaps you have discovered the core of Captain Marriott's fear," said the Rajah, and relapsed at last into open laughter, while Richard and Sunara, whom nothing on this night could provoke or disturb, smiled at his antique pleasure, and then at their shared amusement, and then for themselves alone.

As on the earlier evening, other women had followed Sunara's maids of honour into the audience chamber and were now joining the gathering; soon the room was thronged. But there was an air of preoccupied expectancy which heightened each moment beyond mere enjoyment; people would break off from their talk and stare with interest at the Rajah and the other dignitaries, keeping their movements under survey.

A canopy, like a great golden umbrella with ornamental tassels, had been brought and raised above the Rajah's ivory throne; and now a kind of portable altar of the most delicate workmanship —ivory and ebony intermingled—was carried out and placed on the trestle-table under the same majestic covering.

Selang Aro, not less grim and withdrawn than before, had come forward, and was busy with the arrangement of certain objects upon this altar; they were a scroll of parchment bound with leather thongs, a tiny chalice of gold supported on a slender stem, and a dagger with a brilliant jade hilt. There was also the skull-cup, freshly brimming with wine, which was so placed as to furnish a centre-piece for this strange array.

Richard turned to his mentor, Amin Bulong. "What is this?" he asked the old man in an undertone. "If I am to take part I

must know the formalities. I do not wish to make any error."

"You are to take part," answered Amin Bulong, surveying him with eyes unexpectedly moist with feeling, "and you will make no errors."

At that moment the Rajah walked forward until he stood underneath the golden canopy, and throughout the vast room an instant silence fell.

The old man's bearing was proud and stately; his slight figure had gained in presence, drawing nobility from its regal setting, and especially from the motionless attention of all in the room. When he spoke, after a pause, it was in his own tongue; but he pronounced the words simply and slowly, so that it was easy for Richard Marriott to follow.

"I will not interrupt your pleasure for long," said the Rajah. "Indeed, I hope to add to it, as well as to my own . . . You are bidden here for two purposes tonight. One of them you know —it is to celebrate the defeat of our enemies at the hands of a brave man. The other one, you do not know—though it is possible that some of you have guessed it. It is to witness my adoption of a son."

A gasp went round the room; it was clear that, in spite of the gossip and the whispering which had filled the Sun Palace for many days, most of those present had no foreknowledge of the Rajah's true intention. Richard, preserving an impassive face, felt his heart beating loudly. So this was the answer to the puzzle.

He knew that there could be no greater honour for any man in this country; such an adoption was a most signal mark of favour, placing him at one stroke on a pinnacle of distinction. What else it might carry with it, either now or in the future, he could not guess and did not wish to ponder; it was enough at this moment to relish the award for what it implied, in terms of approval and open recognition.

The low murmur of voices was stilled as the Rajah began to speak again.

"You all know this man," he said with simple directness. He had no need to point at Richard or to indicate him by name; every eye in the room was bent on the tall figure in the imposing uniform standing just outside the golden canopy. "He has proved himself a true friend of Makassang. He has fought our battles. He has overthrown our enemies. It may be that he has saved us from utter destruction. He is therefore worthy to be called our son. It is the greatest honour in our power to give, and we give it to him freely."

He motioned for Richard to come forward, and the latter joined the Rajah under the canopy of state. He felt rather than saw that, along with all the rest, Sunara was staring towards him; he knew what he would read in her eyes if he should turn to look. But he gazed straight ahead as the Rajah motioned again, this time for Selang Aro to join them.

The High Priest, who could not be liking the moment or any-

thing connected with it, came forward until he was standing between the two principal figures. He seemed to know what was required of him, though this must have been a rare ceremony, if indeed it had ever been witnessed before by anyone in the room. He took up the jade dagger in one hand and the small gold chalice in the other; then he signed to Richard to bare his arm, and when this was done he made a tiny incision at the wrist, no more than a deep pin-prick, and drew a few drops of blood which he let fall into the chalice.

Richard bore the small wound without flinching; at the moment of the broaching of his flesh, he thought he saw, deep in Selang Aro's eyes, a brief shadowy stirring, as if, when he wielded the knife, the High Priest might be wishing that he could wield it to more purpose. But it might have been a trick of the light, and in any case it was so swift a flicker of feeling that it had vanished without trace before Richard could well recognise it.

Within a few moments the Rajah's blood joined Richard's in the chalice. Selang Aro raised it high above him, and intoned, "The royal blood is mingled. With this act, you shall be father and son." Then he lowered it and allowed the few drops to fall into the skull-cup; and this in turn he presented to the Rajah.

The old man held it poised a few inches from his lips, dwelling on the solemn moment.

"We take you as our son," he said, in a moved voice, and drank briefly of the wine. Then he held out the cup to Richard.

With nothing to guide him, Richard spoke the first words that came into his mind, by way of worthy answer. He said, in Malay, "I take you as my father," and also drank. Then he set down the cup and, on an impulse, leaned over and embraced the old man with both arms.

He had made no mistake; his instinct had been true, as his movement had been natural. Murmurs of appreciation came from every quarter of the room. He was suddenly surrounded by smiling faces; the Rajah clasped his hand in a warm grip, folding into it the parchment document which was, it seemed, his patent of nobility; and when at last Richard turned to look at Sunara, her face also was alight with happiness.

Quickly the tableau moved on; Amin Bulong and the chiefs of the Council of State crowded round to give him their good wishes; he noticed that all of them now addressed him as Tunku—meaning Prince—as if this were a distinction which had been settled on earlier. He felt himself to be surrounded by friends and well-wishers, by public honour, by a benevolent esteem which, flowing towards him, was as heartening as a rising tide.

The Rajah, it seemed, had one more thing to say, and when the general movement was subsiding he held up his hand for silence, which was quickly accorded.

"The ceremony is finished," he said. There was a lightness in his tone, displacing his former solemnity. "I now have a son, whom it is my pleasure to name the Tunku of Makassang. You

know that I have a daughter also, the Princess Sunara." There came into his voice and his look an added touch of humour, almost of roguishness. "I should make it clear to you all that they are not, in truth, brother and sister."

There was a startled silence, then the allusion was caught, and the whole room seemed to dissolve into delighted laughter. Richard looked at Sunara; her eyes were downcast, but into her pale cheeks a warm blush had crept, which nothing could disguise. After a moment she looked up bravely under the probing of a thousand amused and speculative glances; then she put her hand into Richard's, and together they faced the great audience to acknowledge the truth of what the Rajah had hinted. The murmur of the throng swelled to acclamation, carrying with it an earnest of unstinted loyalty; there seemed no one in the room who did not wish them well.

It was upon this moment of love and triumph that there now burst a most unseemly intrusion.

It came first as a confused flurry of sounds from a distant portico, and the heavy trampling of booted feet; then as a voice, raucous and rough, shouting, "Out of my way, you damned yellow dog!" A spear dropped clattering on a marble floor. At the far end of the room, the crowd stirred, and wavered, and drew back, allowing entrance to three figures who stood out from their surroundings like hawks in a flight of doves.

They were white men, and arrogantly so; as they advanced, they cleft and elbowed their way through the assembled guests and on to the floor of the audience chamber, striding with great insolence, as many Europeans did among Asiatics. Truculent and uncouth, perhaps full of liquor, they struck a note of the utmost vulgarity. With a sudden sense of shame, Richard Marriott realised that they were his own mutinous crew. They were Nick Garrett and Peter Ramsay and Peal, who had been a tinker and was now, it seemed, a drunken sailor on the loose.

A cold silence fell; the trio reached the middle of the floor, halfway to the high table. Nick Garrett was in the lead, dressed in his rough working-clothes, a cutlass at one side of his belt, a pistol on the other. Amin Sang, the young captain of his grandfather's guard, came forward a few steps as if preparing to intercept them; but Garrett halted twenty paces off and looked slowly round him, first at the high table and then directly at Marriott.

In the warm night air he was sweating, and the smile on his face was heavy and mirthless. When he had looked his fill and the taut silence had stretched to intolerable limits, he stuck his hands in his belt with a gesture of contempt and called out to Richard, "We were not bidden to your banquet, but you see we are here just the same!" And then, with particular venom, "Well now, Dick! Where's your greeting? Have you forgotten your old shipmates?"

It was a most shameful moment, and Richard stood in confused

silence while Amin Sang and some members of his guard started down the steps towards the intruders, their spears grasped and ready. But it was the Rajah who made the first effort to meet the situation on a plane of normality.

He called out sharply to Amin Sang, "Wait!" and then he turned to Richard. "These are your men?"

"Yes, Your Highness," said Richard. Recovering from the first shock of surprise, he felt anger and the need for action flooding in. "I will express my regrets to you later. But at the moment—"

Like Amin Sang, he made as if to start towards the intruders, and the menace in his bearing was unmistakable. Once again the Rajah intervened. "Let them be made welcome," he said. "On this night there are no strangers in my house."

"You hear that, Dick?" Garrett called out to him mockingly. "You may be too good for us, but others think differently! What about a draught of wine, now? We have climbed a long way to get it!"

Richard looked about him. He saw disgust and anger on many faces; a rightful disdain in Sunara's expression; a cold courtesy in the Rajah's. Only Selang Aro seemed unconcerned, as if he were not at all surprised by the turn of events. Earlier, the High Priest had stood aside from the well-wishers who had crowded round to clasp the hand of the newly-adopted son; but now he had drawn close again—indeed, he was within a few feet of Richard, his face expressionless, his hands hidden in the folds of his monk's robes.

Suddenly, Richard's sixth sense of danger came to life, but before he could react to the stab of warning, the silence and the stillness burst into ugly violence.

Nick Garrett bellowed loudly, "Wine, I say!" and, having spoken these three words, which must have been an agreed signal, he whipped the pistol from his belt and levelled it at the Rajah. As in a dream, Richard watched the wild uproar unfold. Garrett fired, but not before old Amin Bulong had thrown his body in front of his master to receive the ball in his own chest. Ramsay and Peal both aimed and fired at the same moment, finding their marks among the guests at the high table. Then a great shout from John Keston, who had been attending Richard throughout the evening, made the latter whip round.

He was almost too late. Selang Aro, that impassive man of peace, had his long-concealed dagger raised to strike. It was aimed treacherously at Richard's back; turning, he received the thrust on the heavy gold epaulette which covered his left shoulder. The padded braid turned the weapon, though it could not deflect it completely. Richard felt a shaft of pain as the blade seared the flesh above his collarbone. He threw off Selang Aro and then staggered back, his right hand clutched to the bleeding wound.

Sunara rushed to his side, her face distraught, while all around them a wild turmoil exploded. Amin Bulong had fallen insensible, his body still shielding the Rajah; young Amin Sang, the Captain

of the Bodyguard, was pillowing his grandfather's head in his arms, cherishing the last moments of his life. Colonel Kedah and some of the Palace Guard made for the assassins, their weapons poised, théir faces contorted with fury. Richard saw both Ramsay and Peal fall under half a dozen spear thrusts, before a worse confusion invaded the room.

This must be more than a simple attempt at assassination, thought Richard bemusedly—for now general fighting began to break out on the fringes of the audience chamber and to erupt towards the high table. Bands of armed strangers made their appearance, shouting, brandishing spears and heavy cutting parangs, cleaving a way towards Nick Garrett, who still held his attackers at bay; among them—a vile mark of treachery, this—was one of the grease-daubed wrestlers who had lately been entertaining them. It was strange to see this figure of fun transformed into a demon with a flailing axe. He also was making for the high table, and perhaps for Richard himself, but a spear-thrust from one of the guards took him under the heart, and his larded body toppled and slithered down the steps again, as indecent in death as it had been comical in life.

Not only the enemy strangers, but the Land-Dyaks, were now fighting. By the misfortune of this occasion, each of the chiefs who formed the Council of State had brought with him his own small bodyguard. Many of these, coming from different parts of Makassang, were unknown to each other; some, on the other hand, came from smaller tribes or families which had been traditional enemies in the past, and were not more than wary truce-keepers at the present time. With the whole room now in an uproar, with women screaming, men fighting and dying, tables overturned, wine spilt, tapestries torn from the walls, it was not long before these men of the bodyguards caught the infection of fear and took to fighting among themselves.

Richard still stood under the golden canopy, supported by John Keston and a weeping Sunara who clung to his unhurt arm. He had lost some blood, but his brain was clearing from the misty confusion which the shock of the attack had brought. Presently he said, " Let me be . . . I am well enough . . ." and he straightened his tall body and looked about him.

Selang Aro, the would-be assassin, had slipped away. In the main part of the room the fighting ebbed to and fro; Nick Garrett, shouting obscenities, was still on his feet, the centre of a knot of his allies who kept Colonel Kedah and the guard at a long arm's length. At the high table, Amin Sang had released his grandfather's dead body and was standing sentinel over the Rajah, whose frail form was menaced by the hand-to-hand fighting which now threatened to engulf the entire room.

Richard had come unarmed to the banquet; he cursed the niceness which had made him leave his pistols in his room and reduced his armament to his ceremonial sword. But he now drew this from its scabbard, wincing at the pain of the effort, and

set to work to bring order out of the chaos surrounding him.

He shouted to Amin Sang, "Take your men, and help Kedah! Rally the guard! Clear the floor, and we can see what we are doing!" And as Amin Sang hesitated, looking behind him at the defenceless Rajah who had now almost collapsed upon his throne, Richard shouted again, "I will see to him! I and John Keston! I give you my word! Get down among those devils and push them back to the walls!"

Amin Sang raised his hand in acknowledgment, and took his men under command, and made for the main fighting in the centre of the audience chamber; it was good to see the small tough spearhead of his guard cleaving its bloody way through the throng. With no other word necessary, John Keston stationed himself in front of the Rajah, his cutlass at the ready; while Richard turned to Sunara who, regardless of her safety, still had eyes only for him.

"I love you!" he shouted. At that moment of stress and danger, it seemed the only appropriate thing to tell her. "But I want you alive! Leave us—go to your room—lock yourself in with your women!"

"I will not leave you!" she panted. "You are hurt. Do not make me go!"

"Then stand by Keston under the canopy . . ." He found time to smile, in the midst of the turmoil. "I will return, Sunara. I am off on a mission of peace."

At that, with his ornate, blunted sword in his hand, he began to move among the guests and the warring bodyguards at the high table, ordering them to put up their weapons, threatening them with hanging if they did not. His tall figure, which had been such a focus of honour and fealty a few minutes earlier, carried its own authority; and his fierce bearing did the rest.

In this corner of the room, at least, peace began to return, especially to the men of substance who already began to see the struggle in its true outlines. Presently they started to join him in his efforts, imposing their own discipline on those who would still fight, outfacing the determined, in a few cases shedding blood to enforce their will. Calm gradually settled; the person of the Rajah was made safe, as some of his Council joined to form a circle round the ivory throne; and Richard could turn his attention to the main struggle.

His practised eye, which had gauged many a close fight, told him that the worst was over, the day was almost gained. Amin Sang and Kedah, working in a pattern of unison which was a professional delight to see, were quickly clearing the floor, pushing back the mob into the more confined space of the colonnades which flanked the room, where those who still chose to fight could be cornered and subdued, a single segment at a time.

There were already signs of weariness; there was less shouting, more hard-breathing concentration on simple survival; the enemy, whoever had composed their cohorts—and what an inquest there

would be, thought Richard grimly; what an inquest, and what an execution afterwards—the enemy had lost the momentum of treacherous surprise, and were now more simply matched, sword for sword, wound for wound. He noticed that, as victory seemed near, the Palace Guard was beginning to run wild in the lust to avenge; there was much headlong pursuit and aimless slaughter of people who could be nothing except innocent—slaves, punkah-workers, attendants who had come to pour out wine and who remained to spill their own blood.

The avenging troops were scarcely to be blamed for this excess. They had seen their Commander-in-Chief killed, their Rajah menaced, their comrades slaughtered; if the treachery had been successful it would have been their own blood now darkening the mosaic floors, making the marble steps slippery and loathsome. The wailing screams for mercy which began to take the place of fiercer battlecries were a measure of this relief, now turned to sullen fury; Richard knew he could not have stemmed it even if he would. The bloodletting must run its course. Peace would only come when enough dishonoured graves had been filled.

Meantime, there was one grave which must surely be furnished . . . Nick Garrett was not yet numbered among the slain or the fugitive; indeed, his hulking figure, towering over friend and foe, dominated that corner of the audience chamber where the fighting still raged. With no time to reload his pistol, he fought two-handed, a cutlass in his right hand, a sailor's dirk—honed to a razor-sharpness—in his left; at close range, he was too formidable to be overcome, and in the constantly changing movement of men he was a difficult target for any other kind of attack.

Richard saw one of the Palace Guard circling stealthily with a short throwing spear poised in his hand, waiting for an opening; but when he did launch the spear, it flew past Garrett's jerking shoulder and killed one of the thrower's own comrades in useless slaughter. But as Richard watched, he felt a touch on his arm. It was Sunara, and in her hand she carried his two pistols, Castor and Pollux, already primed and loaded. Unseen, she must have slipped away and made the dangerous journey to his room, and returned with this most timely aid.

He looked at her, wordless, his admiration overflowing; and she smiled back with fine spirit, and said, "Here—finish him!"

He took the two pistols in either hand—though his left hung nearly useless—and strode down the steps towards the fighting men. In all the press and uproar, Nick Garrett saw him coming, and saw also what he carried. Clearing a space round him with a whirling arm, Garrett bellowed his anger and his defiance; he seemed within an ace of rushing headlong towards his main enemy, ready to match his blade against the chance of a bullet.

But when Richard's arm came up, sighting the pistol carefully across the tangling bodies and tossing arms, Garrett's nerve wavered. On an impulse which could not be questioned, he ducked swiftly out of the line of fire and jumped for the steps and

the nearest portico. Richard's shot, changing its aim swiftly, shattered an ornamental jar of magnolia blooms a foot above his head. Then Garrett was out of sight, and with him gone the heart-beat of the battle swiftly died.

Richard turned, racing for the door leading to the gardens and the Steps of Heaven; swift as he was, a panting figure caught up with him and ranged alongside in pursuit. It was Amin Sang, the bereaved, spear in hand, intent on the same execution.

Running together, they left the lighted uproar of the palace, and emerged into what seemed by contrast a pitch-dark night. But there were torches set in iron holders at the edge of the garden. Richard seized one, and Amin Sang another. Ahead of them, a shadowy figure sped away into the gloom and leapt out of sight down the first flight of steps.

Others joined the pursuit, with torches or without. As their eyes gained strength, the moonlight gained also, showing them Garrett's figure hurtling down the steps, the light on the water far ahead, and the comet-tail of flaming torches flaring out in pursuit.

Richard and Amin Sang ran side by side, and step by level step; the pleasure of the chase had restored Richard's strength, and for Amin Sang, his grandfather's blood must be spurring him on to pious loathing of the murderer. Halfway down the Steps of Heaven, in full cry among the streaming torches, it was clear that they were gaining on their quarry, and must soon overtake.

For Richard, it was paramount that he should gain most of all, and be the first one in the racing pack to catch up with the outlaw. For Garrett was his own man; it was Richard who had brought him to the island, it was Richard who shared the guilt until Garrett was destroyed. There was dishonour by association, also; in accounts of this night, in folk-tales which would assuredly grow up round it, men must never say that it was the Tunku of Makassang's right-hand man who had attempted to murder the Rajah, to procure the succession for his own lord, and that they were both party to the same base plot, an infamous return for honour . . . He himself must be Nick Garrett's executioner.

Pricked by this need, he forgot his weariness and his loss of blood, and began to charge full tilt down the sloping steps, expending every ounce of energy in the effort to outstrip the others and to close with the figure ahead. They were nearing the water at the lower end of the Steps of Heaven; already Garrett's form began to be silhouetted against the pale expanse of moonlit ocean.

He was labouring now, his energy sapped as much by drinking and wenching as by the hard, hour-long fight he had waged and lost in the audience chamber; Richard, though gasping himself, could hear the other man's loudly sobbing breath, and his heavy footfalls stumbling their way down the last remaining steps.

Then suddenly they were there, at their journey's end . . . It was the foot of the Steps of Heaven; there was nothing beyond save darkness and blank water. Richard, beside himself with the hunger to kill, hurled his torch at Nick Garrett. When it missed

and fell hissing into the sea, he swiftly sighted his pistol and fired his only shot. But his aim, ruined by the uncertain light and the pumping of his heart, was wild, and the shot missed also. Now he had nothing—nothing save his bare hands, which would have to be enough.

Nick Garrett had turned snarling, at bay. It must have been a fearful sight, with the water lapping greedily at his back, to see the stream of torches closing in on him, to hear the hoarse breathing and the wolfish cries, to have the avenging figure of Richard Marriott as the focus of all this.

But he was a brave man and a desperate one. He stood up straight, and gasped out, "Come on then, Dick!" A gleam at his right hand showed that he still had his sailor's dirk.

Richard came on; as he did so, the circle of torches closed in at his back, a fiery ring of witnesses; in front there was nothing save the hated figure who must be destroyed, whose grave—the sea itself—was palely gaping for him. He feinted to the right, and as Garrett brought the dirk across, probing savagely for Richard's chest, he clawed at Garrett's arm and secured an iron hold on it. No man alive could have loosed himself from such a grip; the dirk, falling with a clatter on to the lowest step, was the evidence of this.

Now they were man to man; the one near to exhaustion, the other wounded and weak from loss of blood. In such a struggle Richard had always been able to hold his own. But it must be done quickly, he thought, or his strength would not last him out.

Nick Garrett had his life to lose; Richard Marriott, besides the same stake, had an enormous rage that one of his own men could have behaved with such treachery. Even thieves' honour should hold back from this margin of shame . . . He forgot his pain, he felt himself briefly and invincibly strong; not even Garrett's knee, coming up to crash into the pit of his stomach, could turn him aside.

While the watchers with their ring of torches closed in, he seized Garrett in the murderous grip which Cornish wrestlers used to make a man cry out for mercy, and forced him to his knees, and then backwards till his neck and shoulders overhung the void at the bottom of the steps. Then Richard, sitting astride Garrett's trunk, raised his hands and locked them together, and brought them crashing down on the other man's face and temples.

There was nothing for Garrett's neck save to give way, and this it did, with a sharp crack. With that sound and a rattle of breath, the man beneath him became a corpse.

Richard, utterly spent, was near to fainting; only the helping hand of Amin Sang at his back saved him from toppling into the water. But then strong arms lifted him clear, and Nick Garrett's body, released, fell over the edge of the last step with a ragged-sounding splash, sank, rose again, and drifted sluggishly away . . .

Richard would have no litter to carry him back. He crouched and rested within the circle of torches, and took a long draught

of wine, and then raised himself and began to climb the Steps of Heaven again, slowly, with Amin Sang at his side. Above them, the Sun Palace, though still ablaze with light, was quiet now and cleansed of strife. In his soul, he had but three things left to do that day: to make his duty to the Rajah, to hold Sunara in his arms, and then to sleep and sleep . . .

He stumbled, in utter weariness, and Amin Sang caught him by the elbow and supported him for a step or two.

"Thank you," said Richard in a throaty voice. His wound, stiffening, made his head swim with pain; his thoughts seemed to be wavering to and fro, like his body, on the long climb. "I am not the strongest man in the world at this moment . . . I hope His Highness came to no harm . . . Your grandfather saved his life at the cost of his own . . . It was bravely done. And you yourself have earned nothing but honours tonight."

"I could have hated you, Tunku," said Amin Sang, astonishingly, out of the night. In a flash of understanding, Richard realised that the young man was speaking, for the first and the last time, of Sunara, and of his love for her which he had not declared and would now never do. "But I cannot hate you now. You have avenged my honoured grandfather . . . From this night forward I am your man, for ever."

Their two hands had been bound together with a silk scarf in token of the uniting of Richard and Sunara. They had eaten rice from the same bowl. They had bowed in obeisance to their elders, and the Rajah had asked for and received their vows. Later, a Buddhist priest—who could take no direct part in the marriage, since earthly love was too profane a matter for men of God—had read from the *Lotus of the True Law*, and a children's choir had chanted their praises.

But all the solemn ceremony of a state wedding had been only a prelude to the feast, which Richard found intolerably prolonged, and the feast only a prelude to the seclusion of their wedding night, which was proving, as yet, even more of an ordeal than what had gone before.

Richard Marriott stood by the open window of his apartment, looking towards the sea, watching the moonlight cleaving a pathway to the far horizon, hearing plainly the surf of the Kutar beaches miles away to the south. Round him the Sun Palace was sunk in a deep night-time silence; though in the audience chamber the merriment continued, yet it could not penetrate here, where the coral walls were thick, the teak doors as solid as rock, the solitude absolute. His thoughts were the thoughts of a bridegroom, yet they were mingled with other thoughts, ranging from the strange past to the shadowy future.

He had taken many women in that past, but Sunara was not to be "taken," save with tenderness and reverence. For the first time since the youthful escapades he had doubts of how he would acquit himself; his desire for her was most potent, yet beyond

this there was the need for gentleness, the need not to shock or hurt her, the loving awe which might inhibit manhood. She was adored above all.

It had been a long and trying day. His shoulder was still stiff and painful from the dagger wound. He wanted nothing more from this day, from this life, save to lie in her arms, but he wanted this with the fiercest hunger he had ever experienced.

They would find their joy or their embarrassment soon enough . . . He shifted his position, leaning on the sill of the wide window, staring out into a star-pricked, perfumed darkness which answered no questions, gave no hint of what was real and what a dream.

In many ways, Sunara was his only certainty. This was their marriage day, because he loved her. He had remained in Makassang, because he loved her. He was an adopted son and a prince, because he loved her. But none of these things helped him to divine the future. Rather did they cloud it almost beyond discovery. Within a few moments, perhaps, such thoughts would not matter; drowning in love, in Sunara, all doubts and puzzlements would melt away. Or perhaps they would matter more strongly still, perhaps they would be all he would have left, if the tide of love were out, if she turned from his rough and intrusive body and left him alone once more.

By the light of reason he was alone in any case; as much alone as if he had been shipwrecked or marooned. His ship *Lucinda D.* had disappeared, most strangely, on the night of the banquet and the fight; she had been there at anchor when Nick Garrett had made his attempt, but in the morning she was gone. Under whose command? He could not guess.

Selang Aro had also disappeared, fading into the shadows without trace. He was not hidden in the Shwe Dagon, which had been invaded and turned upside down by the Palace Guard; nor had the most painstaking torture of captives revealed his whereabouts. There were plenty of rumours and endless talk in the bazaars, but all trails had run dead like rivers trickling into sand.

Only Richard Marriott, a captain without a ship, a fighter without an enemy, remained in Makassang, at the centre of a private maze which returned a blank face to all questions. Why was he here? Why should he stay? What was in the future? It seemed that, in fantastic faith, he was looking for all these answers towards a single, lovely, and studious brow.

And she of this brow was here . . . Behind him the beaded curtains stirred and rustled, and a soft hesitant voice said, " Tuan."

My lord . . . He turned, his throat suddenly constricted, and looked at Sunara. She was standing in the arched doorway between the two halves of the dimly-lit apartment; she was dressed for the night, for sleep, for love, in a modest robe of silk which matched her submissive face—and yet belied it. For she was beautiful, and her small form was undisguisedly shaped for joy.

He remembered how he had seen her, half wanton, half shy,

on the night in the treasure vault, and how it was for this present moment that they had both held back—though they had not known it then. As he came towards her now, he prayed that his touch upon her soft body could carry her past all fears, and that she would presently concur in readiness and welcome him as the glove welcomes the hand.

At his gentle pressure on her shoulder she said again, in the same submissive voice, "Tuan." But she was trembling; through the thin silk he could feel the uncontrollable shaking of her body; her eyes were downcast. He pressed her to him lightly and said what was in his heart.

"Do not be afraid, Sunara. I love you. I will never hurt you. Not tonight. And not ten years from tonight. You can be sure of that."

"I know it." She had dropped her head on his shoulder trustfully, as if she knew that before long it would come to be at ease there. "I am foolish. But it is only my body which is trembling. I was waiting for you, as I have been taught by the old ones. What were you thinking of, staring out of the window?"

"Only of you . . . No, that is not true. I was thinking a little of the past, and a great deal of the future. And I was asking myself some riddles."

"Such as, the reason why you are here?"

"Yes." Wondering at her perception, he pressed her body again, feeling it becoming calmed, divining that it would soon be warmed, as his own was warmed. "Yes, that was the chief riddle. But it does not matter now."

"Why not?"

"Because I am holding you."

"That is why you are in Makassang." She made a slight movement towards him, and suddenly it was enough to set his blood on fire—fire which she swiftly caught. "You have made me brave, now," she said. "I knew it would be so. You are here because of love, and you are *here*—" she let herself be drawn closer still—"because I am yours. Do you remember, in the vault?"

"Yes," he said. "Oh yes."

Before they knew it, their fingers were intertwined, fumbling at the fastenings of her robe; and then, as he held her away from him, she was revealed, and her pale exquisite body glowed in the lamplight.

She raised a beautiful, untroubled face. "Do you remember? This was what your eyes sought. And then your hands. Your gentle hands."

"And now I seek all the rest."

"It is yours. Now I am *very* brave. I will never be more brave, in all my life. Take me now. Tuan. My lord. Take me now."

There was a time in the night, at a sighing moment when she was his, that she said, again: "Ah, Tuan!" But that was different. as. by then, all the world was different.

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SPOTTING THE WINNER

You can't fault a woman's instinct in this kind of business

BY VICTOR CANNING

TAKE a beautiful girl, and then two young men in love with her, and the girl not able to make up her mind—and it's a wise man who would lay bets which way the girl is going to jump.

Take the girl to begin with: Gloria Brown, twenty-three, blonde, and with everything in the right place. Each time she walked down the street a dozen men got cricks in their necks. But she was a nice girl, and reasonably honest—except where love and a few other things were concerned. Of course, you couldn't be entirely straight when young men like Nick Finch and Johnny Allsop were involved because neither of them earned his living in a strictly honest way.

Of the two, Johnny was the one who had an occasional twinge of conscience about it. Johnny was a slim young chap with a pleasant face, a bit freckled, and red hair. The thing he really wanted to do in his heart was to get out of London and run a small market garden. Johnny had green fingers. He could stick a toothpick in a pot and make it grow.

Nick Finch was a different cup of tea from Johnny: dark, slick, goodlooking, and never happier than with his feet on a pavement, his back against a street wall, and a copy of the racing edition in his hands. And he had a way with the girls. In fact, he was leading Johnny with Gloria by about five lengths—until the day that Johnny came up with a winner. It was a good winner, too.

Nick and Johnny worked together professionally—Nick was usually the outside man—and they had pulled off a nice little job on a suburban house. Johnny, after collecting his money from the fence, had put fifty pounds on a horse at twenty to one. A thousand pounds. That thousand did things to all three of them. The waning light of love for Johnny in Gloria's eyes took on a new burnish.

Nick Finch's face took on a surly look, and he was furious when Gloria refused to spend a day at Brighton with him. But Johnny was the one with a light step. With a thousand he could make the first payment on a little market garden he'd spotted in Kent with a cottage attached. And he sold the idea of a country life to Gloria. She saw herself standing in the doorway with dark red rambler roses showing off her blonde hair; and beyond cabbages, brussels sprouts, and onions stretching away in profitable rows.

So keen was Johnny on it that he wanted to break up his partnership with Nick and get started right away. But Nick wasn't having that. At the time of Johnny's big win they had another job lined up. This was to go over the wall of a small factory and into the pay office to the safe—a laughable affair—and then out with whatever was inside the safe.

Nick insisted that they do this last job before they dissolved their partnership. And Nick was really determined that it should be the last Johnny would do. If he could see Johnny safely inside for three years he knew that he would have a clear field with Gloria.

Well, Johnny had to agree. After all he was a loyal sort of chap and they had already fixed up the job. But it was to be his last. They tackled the factory about eleven o'clock at night. Nick drove the car and Johnny and Gloria were with him. Gloria often got bored when they were working at night and liked to come along with them for the ride.

This night Johnny was to go over the wall first, check that the coast was clear, and then give Nick the wire to follow him. They parked the car a hundred yards up a deserted sidestreet and, as it had started to rain heavily, Johnny borrowed Nick's mackintosh from the car and slipped out into the night. Gloria and Nick sat in the car, and Gloria was wondering why Nick had let Johnny have his mackintosh without any fuss. If anyone was to get wet it wasn't usually Nick. A little later she understood why.

After a few minutes they heard a whistle blow and then an alarm bell ring.

Nick started the car.

"Let's get out of this," he said.

"But what about Johnny?"

"Damn Johnny, he's been nabbed. No reason for all of us to be hooked. We're off!"

There was sense in what he said. But as Nick drove Gloria off she was thinking about the trouble Johnny must be in, and she was sure—you can't fault a woman's instinct in this kind

of business—that Nick had deliberately tipped off the police about the job beforehand.

She tackled Nick about this, but he put on a very indignant act and swore blue he had done nothing of the kind. Gloria knew then that he was lying. If he had been innocent he would have slapped her across the face for such an unprofessional suggestion. She kept silent and worried about Johnny.

She dropped Nick at his flat and, as he got out, he said, "Get rid of the car and come back. If the police do come round to my place, I've been in all the evening. We'll have spent a cosy time together."

Gloria drove the car to the garage where Nick kept it and then, hoisting her umbrella, walked round the corner to Johnny's place. He had a room above a shop. She let herself in and waited. For all she knew she might have to wait a long time. Three years, possibly . . .

In fact, it was exactly half an hour. Johnny came panting into the room and stood there, his mackintosh dripping with rain. "Johnny—what happened?" Gloria went to him and gave his wet lips a hearty kiss.

"What happened? I'll tell you," said Johnny bitterly. "That so-and-so Nick must have fixed me. I was just going to give him the all clear when whistles and bells went off all over the place like a lot of football referees gone mad. I tell you, Gloria, I *took off like greased lightning.*

"The place seemed full of coppers. Three of them chased me round the factory yard and I thought I was done for. Then I slipped into the shadow of a big entrance gate, flattened myself up against it, and they went roaring by me. That was enough for me. I reached for the top and was over. And I didn't come back here by the direct route either. That damned Nick. It's because of you, you know."

He slipped out of his mack and slung it over a chair. He was just going to catch hold of Gloria and take another instalment of loving kisses when she shook her head and picked up the mack.

"Don't want this around, Johnny—just in case the police call. You've been here all evening and I've been with you." She held the mack up in front of her and smiled. She was a girl with a very quick eye. "I'll get rid of this. If the police call, tell 'em your alibi has just gone down the road to phone her ma that she'll be home late. I'll be back."

She gave him a quick kiss on the cheek and went out. Umbrella raised, high heels clattering, the mack over her arm, she went to the nearest phone box and spent a few minutes in it. But she didn't telephone her mother. When she came out her smile

was broader, and she made for Nick's flat. She went up the stairs and hung the mackintosh on the hallstand before going in to Nick. Nick was in dressing-gown and slippers, enjoying a whisky and a cigarette.

"You've been a hell of a time," he greeted her lovingly. "The police might have come while you were away and then where would my alibi be? They know I work with Johnny, and if they've got him they might give me a call."

"Keep your hair on, handsome," said Gloria, and she settled alongside him and finished off his whisky.

They made a nice couple when the police arrived ten minutes later. Gloria was in Nick's arms on the settee, her feet up, and her shoes kicked off. Nick looked up at the inspector and the constable and said, "Go away, can't you see I'm busy?"

"None of your lip, Nick Finch," said the inspector. "Just unload that girl and answer a few questions civilly."

Gloria slipped from Nick's arms and stood up, patting her hair into place and giving both policemen a languorous flash of her eyes.

"Fire away," said Nick confidently. "I've got some unfinished business waiting."

"Where have you been all this evening?" asked the inspector.

"Here, of course. Haven't been out at all. Ask Gloria."

The inspector shook his head. "I'm surprised at you trying to drag a lady into this. We don't need to ask anybody. It started to rain just before eleven and you were out in it. Take a look."

The constable stepped forward and held up Nick's mackintosh.

"It's yours. Your name inside, and it's wet," said the inspector.

Nick smiled—but he gave Gloria a quick glance. She smiled back and he didn't like the smile. "Ha, yes, silly of me. I remember now—just about eleven I went out to get some fish and chips, only they weren't frying tonight."

The inspector shook his head. "They weren't frying for you tonight or for many another night to come, Finch. I should say for about three years. I'll tell you where you were tonight. You were starting to do a job in a factory off the High Street. But someone who maybe didn't like you, tipped us off.

"Could have been Johnny Allsop—and he has my thanks. I hear he's made some money on the horses and wants to go straight, and it's my bet he'd like Gloria here to go straight with him—so he wanted you out of the running. What do you say to that?"

"That it's a lot of fairy-tale stuff, and you can't prove a word

of it. I went out—it's true—but you can't prove I went to whatever factory it was. Go ahead and try. The beak will laugh you out of court."

"You'd like to bet on that?"

"I don't want to take your money."

"You won't. You were chased round the yard by three of my men. And a bad job they made of it. You ducked into the shadows of the main entrance gate and they went past you. You had your back pressed hard up against the wooden gates. But in the dark, before you went over the top, there was one thing you didn't notice. On the inside of the gate there's a notice in white paint saying NO SMOKING. And it was only fresh painted three hours before by the nightwatchman who does odd jobs in the early evening. NO SMOKING. Take a look at this."

The constable with an affable grin on his face reversed the mack so that the back showed and there, blurred but still legible, in reverse were parts of the words NO SMOKING.

"On your feet," said the inspector.

Nick looked at Gloria. She was still smiling, not with love, but triumphantly.

And there it was. Nick went off to the police station, and Gloria went back to Johnny and, on his couch this time, took up the routine which for the sake of appearances she had started with Nick. Only this time her whole body and soul were in a performance which was shortly to be transferred from London to Kent for an indefinite run.

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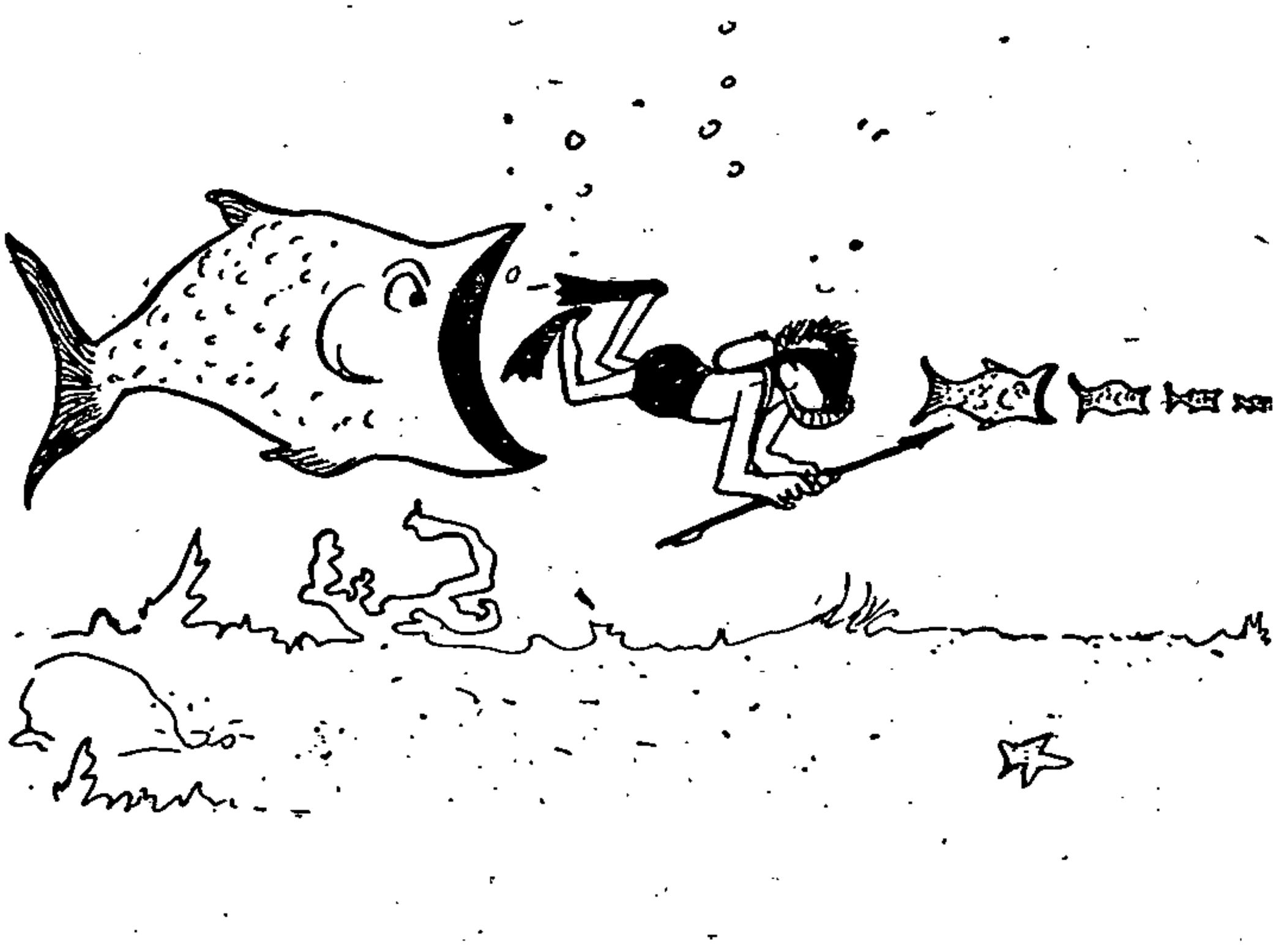

Gift Wrapped

I give that you may give

BISMARCK

Keepsake

" She was," said the young man, sniffing,
" The most beautiful girl
I ever saw.
For two minutes
I stood beside her
In a Tube lift.
I shall never see her again.
She gave me this cold."

He sneezed with gloomy satisfaction,
And I noticed
That he had chosen to sit in a draught.

RICHARD MALLETT, *Translations from the Ish*

Afterthought

" Did you sleep well, Stevie? "
" Yes, Mother, I slept very well . . . "
" And were you comfortable? "
" Yes, very."
" And warm? "
" Yes, warm."
" You know why you were warm and comfortable, Stevie? "
" No."
" Because Mother covered you with her best fur blanket."
" Thank you, Mother. God bless you."
" Stevie, do you like that blanket? "
" Yes, I like it very much."

"Well, Mother will give you that blanket, Stevie."

I said, "Thank you very much, Mother."

She paused. "Mother will give you that blanket for eight hundred dollars, Stevie."

LUDWIG BEMELMANS, *To the One I Love the Best*

Enough's Enough

Now April's here, what ever can I do
With those fantastic gifts I got from you?
Spring's in the air, but, honey, life is hard:
The three French hens are picking in the yard,
And the turtledove, the turtledove
(One of them died)—
Ah, love, my own true love, you have denied
Me nothing the mails or the express could bring.
But look: we're into spring;
The calling birds are calling, calling;
The pear tree's leaves are slowly falling;
I sit here with those cackling geese
And never know a moment's peace.
My memories are mixed and hazy,
The drumming drummers drive me crazy,
The milking maids enjoy canasta,
The lords are leaping ever faster,
The pipers—God in Heaven knows
I've more than had enough of those.
My love, you do such wondrous things
(Who else would think of five *gold rings?)*
Now April's here, the weary days go by;
I watch that wretched dove attempt to fly . . .
Enough's enough; next time be less romantic
And don't send gifts that drive a lady frantic.
Send me a postcard with a pretty view
And I shall look at it and think of you.

DAVID DAICHES, *On the Twelfth Day of Christmas I Screamed*

Missing in Berlin

Written before the closing of the East/West frontier in August . . . even more poignant in the light of the harsh realities of today.

THE doorman at the Hotel Am Zoo had recommended the restaurant, and as Stone sipped his wine and glanced round he decided that the suggestion had been a good one.

It was an Italian place, the Cantina, just off Kurfürstendamm, in the heart of the British sector of Berlin. There were tablecloths, checked in red and white, empty chianti flasks on the wall, and a pianist at a small upright in a corner of the room. The pianist had switched from Strauss to Gershwin when Stone entered, and had smiled to let him know why he had made the change. They could spot Americans a mile off, Stone thought, ordering another glass of moselle.

When the waiter went off with his order, Stone lit a cigarette and listened contentedly to the music. The place wasn't crowded. There was a girl sitting alone at a table near the piano, and two burgherish-looking Germans at the table on his left. They were sipping coffee topped with gobs of whipped cream and discussing meat prices.

The girl was turning the stem of her wineglass with short, capable-looking fingers, while staring absently at the wall. She wore a brown cloth coat, buttoned up to her throat, and her sturdy leather gloves were placed neatly beside her drink. Her hair was short, brown, and straight, and occasionally she pushed a strand of it from her forehead.

Stone decided he hadn't seen a smart-looking woman in the four months he'd been in Germany. They seemed to make a virtue of dowdiness. This one, for instance, had an interesting face, alert and finely made, and grave long-lashed eyes. But she had done nothing to accentuate these points.

The waiter brought his food and hung around as Stone began eating. He wanted to know how Stone liked Berlin. It was different from the rest of Germany, the waiter assured him with pride. Berlin citizens were front-line troops, and always had been—during the war with all the bombing, and the fighting when the Russians came, and the airlift, and now again, surrounded by the Russians and no one knowing when or where the first blow would land. Ah, that made people different, surely.

He wanted to know how Stone found the Cantina. Stone told him his hotel, the Am Zoo, had recommended it.

The waiter said the restaurant was known all over Berlin. And Berlin was a city of magnificent restaurants. Not now, of course,

by William P. McGivern

but before the war, which was such a sad thing for everybody.

Stone finally ordered more wine to get rid of him. So damn typical, he thought, glancing at the man's retreating back. Typical of the individual German, typical of Germany. They got into a mess of their own making and then expected credit for being in it.

He paid his bill, rose with more than his usual care and walked towards the cloakroom. He could move faster and more confidently than he was doing now, but he had a particular horror of taking a spill here in Germany.

With his hat and coat on, he paused to light a cigarette before going outside. He was opening the door when he heard light steps behind him and felt a hand on his arm. Turning, he saw the brown-haired girl at his side, a slight, tense smile on her lips.

In faintly accented English she said, " I am in trouble. Will you let me go outside with you, please? "

Stone was confused by the intensity of her manner. His first reaction was a completely irrelevant one—she was taller than he would have guessed; her grave blue eyes were only a few inches below his own.

" Please. Will you help me? "

" Now take it easy," Stone said.

From the dining-room he heard a voice speak sharply and clearly: " Ober, the check, *bitte !* "

That could only be one of the two men who had ordered rostbraten a minute or so ago. Now he wanted his bill.

The girl stepped past Stone and opened the door. Feeling vaguely uneasy, he followed her into the cold, quiet night. To the left the street led to Kurfürstendamm, the crowded, lighted artery of the Western Sector; to the right it went into a block of bombed, darkened ruins.

" O.K., what's the idea? " Stone said, joining the girl on the pavement.

" Will you let me stay with you for a little? They won't bother me while I am with you," she said.

" Who won't bother you? Those men in the restaurant? "

" Yes. I have no right to ask, but please help me."

Stone looked back at the closed doors of the Cantina, half expecting them to burst open; but nothing happened. He smiled and said, " Maybe you're imagining things."

" No, they'll follow us when we leave here."

She took his arm with surprising strength and turned him towards the Kurfürstendamm; Stone, somewhat amused now, walked along with her towards the brightly lit street.

" Supposing you cut out this melodrama? " he said amiably. " What is it you want? Cigarettes, nylons, or coffee? "

She didn't answer him; she glanced over her shoulder once and then stared straight ahead, and the cold wind blew the hair about her face. " We can take a taxi from here," she said when they reached the crossroads. " If you will go with me, I'll leave the cab when we get away from them."

" You're serious then," Stone said. He took her arm and turned her so that he could look into her eyes. " Why don't you go to the police if they're bothering you? "

" They *are* the police," she said. " East Sector police. Please, we still have a chance now while they're paying the bill."

The girl was frightened, of that much Stone was sure. He hesitated a moment, studying her pale, tired face, and then, for no reason he could understand, said, " O.K., I'll go along for the ride."

He got into the cab beside her, moving awkwardly because of his leg, and told the driver to take them out to Tempelhof.

The girl glanced through the rear window three or four times during the first five minutes, and then turned and settled back into the seat, her hands folded in her lap.

They drove along in silence, passing one ruined block after another. Some of the rubble had been stacked in orderly piles, some of it lay in the tangled heaps made by artillery and bombs years ago.

Stone glanced at the girl. She hadn't said a word since getting into the cab; he had expected her proposition, if any, to come immediately. After all, time was money in Berlin too.

He asked, " Were you here during the war? "

" Yes, I was here."

" I suppose it was pretty bad."

" Yes. For the children especially. They were frightened and couldn't understand. And many of them were killed."

Here it comes again, Stone thought. The poor German martyr, innocent victim of a dreadful but accidental fate.

" There's a building behind my hotel," he said. " It was once a very fine building. But it's flat on the ground now, or most of it is, and cats use it for their early-morning rendezvous. That building, I learnt, was burnt down in 1938. It was a synagogue."

She turned her head to him and a shaft of light from a street lamp touched the planes of her face, and her grave eyes. There was an expression, or a feeling, about her face and eyes he couldn't define: it was a kind of purity, not cold or remote, but warm, intense, and angry.

" That was horrible too," she said. " You don't like Germany, do you? "

" Germany is fine. Fine scenery, fine ski-ing. I'm all for German reconstruction, rehabilitation, democratisation, and all the other big words."

" You don't like individual Germans then? "

" Let's say I don't understand them. Don't worry about it, please. There are lots of things I don't understand."

" How did you injure your leg? "

" I didn't injure it," Stone said sharply. " It was done for me, and damn efficiently."

" In the war? "

" Yes, in the war."

He was angry and defensive now. He must have been tottering

like a drunk if it had been so obvious. He knew it was obvious; you don't lose a leg, then walk like an athlete, no matter how much they spend on a new one. He knew that but didn't like admitting it. He covered up that knowledge by dressing with care, walking and moving carefully, watching his weight, and exercising regularly. It was compensation, of course; he wanted everything about him to be as good as possible, because his left leg, from just above the knee, was a gadget made of plastic, aluminium, and leather. So it was compensation, and to hell with it, he thought.

"Yes, it was in the war," he said. "My captor didn't want to take me with him because the Americans were coming back fast and he wanted no excess baggage. But he couldn't let me go. That wasn't being done just then. So he solved the puzzle by shooting me in the leg and leaving me. I spent a night in the snow and when the American medics found me they cut my leg off."

The girl was silent. He glanced at her, but learnt nothing from her fine, pale profile. When she did speak, minutes later, she surprised him. She said, "It was worth it, wasn't it?"

"What? Oh, sure. I had a spare."

"Well, wasn't it?" she said in a stronger voice. "You were fighting something vicious and evil, and you can't fight something like that without paying for it."

Stone was annoyed. He said, "Let's skip it, shall we?"

She glanced through the rear window, but the street behind them was dark and empty.

He said, "Supposing you tell me the whole story. I deserve a fill-in on what's going on at least."

She smiled without humour. "I didn't think you were interested. Those two men you saw in the Cantina are part of East Sector People's Police. I am an instructor in architecture at the Technical University, which is in the Western Sector. Unfortunately I live in the Eastern Sector, have an East Sector identity card, and that puts me under their authority, or as they prefer to state it, protection. Some of the things I've said in my class have been considered unsympathetic to Eastern policies, and my arrest was ordered. That was four days ago. I've stayed in the West since then, but now they're looking for me."

"Can they force you to go back?"

"Yes, they can."

"And if they do, what happens?"

"I'm not quite sure. No one ever is."

They had come in sight of the great horseshoe building of Tempelhof. Stone leaned forward and told the driver to take them back to the Hotel Am Zoo. He offered the girl a cigarette but she refused. He lit his own, and thought about what she had told him, trying to decide if she was telling the truth.

"You may be taking all this too seriously," he said at last. "After all, they probably won't be too hard on an instructor of architecture. That's a pretty safe subject. Now if you taught political science, it might be different."

" You mean something important? "

He had been trying to distract her, but he hadn't succeeded. " The main thing is they haven't followed you, right? "

" Yes. I can't understand that."

" Now if they really wanted you, and are as determined as you think they are, it stands to reason they wouldn't have let you get away. You may have let yourself be upset by a coincidental meeting with them."

He glanced at her again, noticed her calm, grave face and capable hands, and realised that she didn't seem the sort to be upset without good reason.

" I'm sorry to have bothered you with my troubles," she said. " You have helped me, and I am very grateful. You can drop me off anywhere now."

The driver turned into Kurfürstendamm and pulled up in front of the hotel. Stone made a sudden decision. " Would you have breakfast with me tomorrow morning? " he asked. " Things may look a lot better then. How about it? The food at the hotel is pretty good. Would you meet me here, say around nine? "

" I'd like to," she said. " I'll be here, if it's at all possible."

" My name is Stone. Adam Stone. I'll meet you in the lobby."

The cab stopped and Stone climbed out, a bit too fast for safety, because he didn't want the driver to come round and help him. He beat the man by a good five seconds, and felt pleased about that. He added an extra ten marks to the fare and said, " Take the lady wherever she wishes to go, please."

He leaned inside the cab and shook hands with the girl. " Until tomorrow morning," Stone said. He closed the door and her face was a small blur behind the glass. She waved to him and he waved back, and then the driver started the car.

Stone watched until the cab reached the first intersection. He lit a cigarette and was turning away when he saw a black Mercedes-Benz pull out of the street the cab had just passed, and swing in behind it with a reckless turn.

Instinctively he started forward, flipping his cigarette aside, but he hadn't taken ten steps before he realised he was behaving foolishly. He couldn't possibly catch the cab now, and even if he could there was no point. The Mercedes-Benz was probably driven by some harmless German who thought he was still at the controls of a tank. Stone shook his head and walked back to the entrance of his hotel. His imagination was working overtime.

But as he entered his room he was frowning, and he felt oddly displeased with himself. Whether the girl's troubles were real or imaginary, her fear had been genuine. And he hadn't been much help to her. He lay worrying about that; it was two o'clock before he fell asleep.

The next morning he got up at seven-thirty. He did his exercises quickly and then stared at himself in the mirror, a large powerfully-built man with black hair and stubborn, purposeful features.

Damn it, he thought, the girl's problems weren't any of his business. There was no reason to feel responsible for her because she was in a jam.

Downstairs he glanced at his watch, saw that it was a few minutes off nine. Well, he was early.

But by nine-thirty she still hadn't arrived. Stone, against his custom, smoked a pre-breakfast cigarette. At nine-forty he told the desk he'd be in the restaurant if anyone wanted him, and went downstairs to the Keller.

Stone ate breakfast slowly, keeping an eye on the door. Every time it opened he expected her to walk in, but at ten-thirty, when he had finished his second cup of coffee, she still hadn't arrived. Frowning, he wondered what had kept her, and then he tried to remember what she looked like. Grave eyes and short brown hair were the only features he could recall.

He paid his bill, feeling curiously depressed, and went up to his room to start his work. Stone was in Germany to make an analysis of German insurance firms for his own company. Berlin was his last stop, and he was almost through here. There was the final summary to get in the post to New York tonight, and then he could go home. It had been a big job, and he had been assigned to it primarily because of his dependability and judgment, and secondarily because he spoke German fluently. Now he was eager to get it over, and he should get on, he told himself, staring at his typewriter and the notes that covered the entire top of the table. This was no time to be worrying about a girl he had met through the purest coincidence.

But had it been coincidence? Looking back, the circumstances of the meeting seemed a bit too tidy, a bit in the pattern of a creaking melodrama. Maybe he had been cast as the sucker of the piece and, for some reason, dropped at the last minute. Probably she had found another candidate after leaving him last night.

Stone lit a cigarette and paced the floor restlessly. The thing was, she hadn't seemed that sort. An idea occurred to him then, and with a feeling of relief he put on his hat and coat and went out. The Cantina might be her hang-out, he was thinking, and she might be there now. He could find out why she hadn't kept the date for breakfast, and if she were just an adventuress with a good story for plausible Americans, he could shake off this burden of guilt and get down to work.

He walked to the Cantina and went cautiously down the ice-coated steps and into the restaurant. The English-speaking waiter came towards him, smiling. "You wish breakfast, sir?"

Stone glanced about the room, saw that it was empty. "No, I don't think so. I just dropped in to see if a friend of mine was here."

"You mean the men who were here last night, sir?"

"What men?"

"The two men who sat next to your table when you had dinner," the waiter said. "They asked about you when you left."

"Just a minute," Stone said. His heart had begun to pound.

" You mean those men who were drinking coffee when I came in? "

" Yes, those men, sir. One of them started after you when you left, but the other called him back. The one asked me if you were an American. He thought he had met you in Munich, he said. He asked if I knew where you were staying, and luckily I remembered that you were at the Am Zoo."

" And you told them I was staying at the Am Zoo? "

Something in Stone's face made the waiter apprehensive. " Yes. I thought since they knew you that it was all right, sir. Is something wrong? "

" Never mind," Stone said.

" You will not have breakfast, sir? "

Stone walked out without answering. . .

Back in his room, he sat at his desk and stared out at a shattered building that was visible from his window. This explained why the men hadn't followed the girl last night. They knew she had left with him and when they found out where he was staying they had only to wait until he brought her back to them. And their gamble had paid off perfectly. He had brought her right back on schedule.

Stone remembered the Mercedes-Benz, and he realised with a sort of angry hopelessness that she was beyond any help now. If what she had told him was true, and it probably was, she was under arrest in the Eastern Sector by now.

He ran a hand through his hair, and looked with distaste at the work on his desk. She had said that she taught at the Technical University. Well, that was one place to start. He picked up the phone and asked the operator to connect him with the University.

The woman who answered seemed cônfused when he asked for the architectural faculty. She asked him the name of the person he wanted. Stone told her irritably that he didn't know; but he described the girl as well as he could. There was a silence in his ear for a few minutes. He lit a cigarette with his free hand and tapped his foot nervously against the leg of the bed.

Then a man's voice said, " Yes? Hullo? "

Stone told him what he wanted, and again there was silence on the line. But he sensed that the man was still there. " Hullo," he said sharply.

" I am sorry. Miss Heilgen is not here."

Miss Heilgen. That was a start.

" Where can I reach her? "

" I'm sorry, I don't know."

" I'm an American," Stone said. " I talked with Miss Heilgen last night, and she seemed to be in trouble. I only want to know if she's all right." Again there was silence.

Stone felt anger stirring in him. " I just want to make sure she's O.K. Can't you tell me that much? "

" If you come to the University I will talk to you."

" Fine. Where will I meet you? "

" In the office of the Student League."

"O.K., I'll be right over. What's your name?"

There was no answer; the connection had been broken.

He took a cab to the University, which wasn't far from his hotel. It was a large three-storied building, horseshoe-shaped, enclosing a cold bare courtyard.

Stone stopped a tall lean student and asked for directions. The student insisted on showing him the way. He led Stone along the right side of the courtyard, past three doorways, and at the fourth said, "Go up these stairs to the third floor. The office is the first door on your right."

Stone thanked him, went up to the third floor, and turned into the first room on his right. There was a dark-haired girl writing at a desk, and a man reading a newspaper in the corner.

"My name is Stone," he said to the girl. "I have an appointment to meet someone from your architectural faculty here."

"Who was it you were to meet?" the girl said.

"I don't know. He hung up before I could get his name."

"I see. What did you wish to talk to him about?"

"About a Miss Heilgen. Could you phone your architectural department, or whatever you call it, and tell the person I talked with to come over here." Stone was feeling angry again, angry at himself, angry at this delay.

The man in the corner rose, put his newspaper in his pocket, and walked across the room to Stone. "I'm the person you talked to," he said. "Don't blame the girl. I told her to ask you a few questions."

"Why all the hocus-pocus?" Stone said.

"I wanted to be sure you were an American. My name is Peiner. Will you come with me, please?"

"You're convinced I'm an American, I hope," Stone said as he followed Peiner across the hall into a long conference room.

"Yes, you talk and act like one. What is it you wish from me, Mr. Stone?" Peiner said shortly, and took a seat at a table in the centre of the room.

Lighting a German cigarette, he inhaled deeply. He was about thirty, with a ruddy complexion and curly blond hair that grew down the nape of his neck and over the collar of his tightly-fitting blue suit. There was something about him that gave an illusion of strength.

"I told you on the phone," Stone said. "I wanted to know if Miss Heilgen is all right."

"I wouldn't know."

"She was in trouble last night," he said, ignoring Peiner's abrupt manner. "She told me she was being tailed by two men of the East Sector People's Police. We drove around for a while in a taxi, but we weren't followed, so I dropped off at my hotel and she went on alone." He hesitated, unwilling to tell the rest of it. "Have you heard from her?"

"No."

"Well—what's your guess?"

"My guess, for what it's worth, is that she has been arrested."

"You say that pretty calmly. Does that mean it's not serious?"

"It's quite serious for her, Mr. Stone. What do you propose to do about it?"

"I don't know," Stone said slowly. "What is there to do?"

"I have no idea," Peiner said. "This is one situation you can't solve with a carton of cigarettes or a few pounds of coffee, Mr. Stone."

Stone kept his mouth shut for a few seconds, waiting for his anger to fade. Then he said, "If you want to make cracks, go ahead. When you're through, perhaps you'll tell me about Miss Heilgen."

"Of course I'll tell you about her," Peiner said in a tight voice. "And do you want to know about the others who have disappeared from here in the last three or four years? Do you wish to know what's happened to them, too?"

Stone hesitated, confused by the man's cold, bright anger. "I'd like to know first what you've got against me," he said. "Let's start with that."

Peiner rubbed his forehead with the tips of his fingers and looked away from Stone. "Forgive me; I'm behaving like a fool. Giselle is a good friend of mine. That's why your call was switched to me. I'm—upset. And when I saw you outside in those fine clothes of yours, and snapping at the girl, well, it's hard to explain, but I felt you had no right to care what had happened to Giselle."

"You don't like Americans," Stone said, and these words brought back the girl he now knew as Giselle Heilgen, and an image of her tired, grave eyes.

"No, it isn't that. You are free people, and the world envies and admires you for it. But sometimes you act as if you're the only people entitled to freedom. Germany's record isn't good, I grant you. But we've been working for freedom here, and we know the threats that exist around us. Then you see one instance of that threat and act as if none of us care about it. No, I don't mean that. I don't know what I mean," Peiner said miserably, and dropped his cigarette on the floor. Automatically he drew out his packet, put another in his mouth.

"I'm sorry about barking at the girl," Stone said. "And I'm sorry I didn't help Miss Heilgen last night."

He told him everything that had happened, and as he talked Peiner rubbed the tips of his fingers slowly against his forehead.

"Is there anything to be done?" Stone said.

"I do not think so. We knew for some time that this would happen. A friend of ours in the Eastern Sector told us the plans of the police. Giselle stayed here the last week—not with friends because that might have jeopardised them, but anywhere she could: one night in the school, another in a hotel, another in the station. It couldn't go on, of course."

"What's going to happen to her now?" Stone said slowly.

Peiner shrugged. He seemed spent, as if his energy had been

sustained only by his anger at Stone. " No one can guess. They can do what they wish to her, of course. She may be under guard in her home, she may have been sent away, or she may be in gaol. They can treat her kindly, or they can torture her until she says any ridiculous thing they want her to.

" It is their trick to keep prisoners in suspense. Punishment varies for the same offences, so the will to accept a specific fate is undermined. If you knew you were going to be killed, you could prepare for that. But the mind is a coward and it keeps telling you that others charged with the same offence weren't killed, and so, against your will, you begin to hope. This mixture of fear and hope can break a man to pieces before they put a hand on him."

Peiner stared through the high window that looked over the courtyard, squinting slightly at the bright, cold sunlight. " That is why I am upset. I have known Giselle a long time, and I hope they are quick with her. I would not like her to be changed before she died. We were children together, and even then she was without fear. Giselle went to school in France, and when she came back Germany had changed. Her father was a colonel in the S.S.; her mother was dead.

"One day Giselle saw a yellow sign on a Jewish shop, one of those signs that told us not to buy in such places, and she tore it down and threw it in the gutter. Her father slapped her when he heard about it, and threatened to send her to a camp . . . and he did send her away, not to a concentration camp, but to one that was for certain types of prostitute and mental cases. After the war, her father was dead and she came here to finish her schooling. Then she began teaching.

" That's what got her into trouble. She insisted that nothing useful or beautiful could be built in an atmosphere of fear, and used the rubble of the Eastern Sector to prove her point. That was just one of her theories, of course. I told her to be cautious, but—" Peiner swallowed and looked away from the sunlight.

" Well, why wasn't she? "

" She couldn't stop fighting any more than she could stop breathing," Peiner said. " She was stronger than most of us. That's why they want her, of course. The Russians are shrewder than the Nazis, Mr. Stone. The Nazis killed millions of people trying to stamp out their enemies, but the Russians know that if you get rid of the few strong persons the rest can be handled like so many sheep. Here and there, in Germany, in the world, I suppose, are defiant, free spirits, who shine like flames in the night, and because of that, because they are bright and easily seen, the Russians find it easy to put their thumbs down on them and smother the light. And the darkness closes in on those who are left."

" Where does she live? "

" What are you thinking? "

" I don't know," Stone said. " But you said she might be under arrest at her home."

" Yes, but you can't go there."

"I wasn't thinking about that," Stone said. "I'm just angry. Where does she live?"

"She lives at 113 Ullemstrasse." Peiner gave Stone instructions for finding the street.

Stone repeated the directions to himself. Peiner watched him curiously and then Stone realised rather wearily that he wouldn't need her address, now or at any time. He had been stirred for an instant by a mixture of anger and shame, but the feeling passed as he perceived sadly that he was too old, too committed to the habit of compromise, to make quixotic gestures or to act heedlessly, recklessly, purely, no matter what was at stake.

"It's a damn shame," he said, and the words were thin and empty.

"Yes," Peiner said, without expression.

Stone rose, oddly uncomfortable, shook hands politely with him, and limped out of the room.

In his hotel room, Stone tossed his hat and coat on the bed and began pacing the floor. How the devil had he got himself into this mess? He looked out of the window at the clear sunlight and blue sky, and then resumed his pacing. It wasn't his affair. He was not responsible for what had happened to her. His relationship with her was the result of purest coincidence. He couldn't take the troubles of the world on his shoulders; everyone was in one sort of jam or another. In three days he would be home, where his friends were, and his apartment, cameras, and fishing tackle—the things that made up his life. This was no time to get involved in something that was none of his business in the first place.

He told himself that the matter was settled, and went to work resolutely and grimly; but his attention wandered from the words and figures, and he began thinking of the girl again and what might be happening to her. Confused and angry, he resumed pacing, hardly aware that he had left his desk.

She's a German, he thought almost with relief, and so is Peiner. How far could he trust them?

They were an unstable, amoral people. Efficient, dogged, hard-working, maybe, but with only a Neanderthal concept of right and wrong. That was their trouble. With all their know-how and resources they were like a loaded gun that any paranoid fool could pick up and aim at the head of the world. Then when everything went smash they whined and complained and blamed everyone else.

Of course, Giselle hadn't complained or whined, and neither had Peiner. Peiner had been angry at Stone's manner and clothes, and at Americans—yes, for, as he put it, their feeling that they were the only people entitled to freedom. Maybe his own generalisations about Germany were as emotional and faulty as Peiner's were about Americans.

He stopped pacing at last, realising first of all that there was nothing he could do to help her now. He wasn't happy about his decision, but there was nothing else to do. It was a practical

decision. He decided to wash his face and hands, and then, finally and completely, forget about her and get at his work.

He jerked off his tie and shirt, and turned on the water in the basin in the corner of his room. Standing there, he stared for a moment at his bare shoulders and arms; and suddenly it was all clear to him and he changed his mind about washing, about everything.

He paced the floor, frowning. He had to help her, of course. It was as simple as that. He stared with impersonal interest at the formidable muscles that rolled smoothly under his skin. He was thinking that you either tried to help people who were in trouble or you didn't, that you either accepted the responsibilities of humanity or you didn't, and that was the main thing, and all the devious considerations you wrapped round it meant nothing after you had cut through them to the heart of the matter. It wasn't a practical decision he had to make; it was a moral one, although some people, including himself, shied away from that truth as if it were a spectre from hell.

There were some knockabout clothes in his suitcase—a jacket and slacks he had worn on tours of bomb-damaged factories and a pair of muddy shoes which, fortunately, he had not put out to be cleaned.

He dressed quickly, and then put his wallet with his traveller's cheques and passport in the drawer of the desk. He didn't like leaving the passport, but it wouldn't help him in the Eastern Sector. He decided there was no point in leaving a note. If he got back at all, he'd be back tonight.

Pausing at the door of his room, he checked his assets: fifty-five marks in small notes, a penknife, a half packet of matches. Hardly an incriminating bundle of loot, he thought.

Outside on Kurfürstendamm he felt at ease in the crowd. It was cold and sharp, but a thin afternoon sun was shining and he was fairly comfortable without his overcoat.

Inside the vast, cold station, which was only three blocks from his hotel, a young man in crepe-soled shoes and a leather overcoat glanced hesitantly at him, and then said, " Do you wish to sell any dollars, sir? The price is good today."

Stone almost smiled. They were wonderful, he thought. Hatless, coatless, shirtless—it made no difference. They could spot an American if he were wearing only a barrel.

" I could use some East Zone marks," he said.

" You have no dollars? "

" Not to sell. How about the East marks? "

" Of course. How many do you want? "

" Just a few. About ten marks' worth."

The young man removed a worn, bulging wallet from the inner breast pocket of his coat, counted out fifty East Zone marks and gave them to Stone.

" They won't buy very much," he said. " There's nothing there to buy, you know."

"I suppose not." Stone had bought the money thinking it would come in handy for a cab ride, a drink, something. "How did you know I was American?" he asked.

"Well, I just took a chance," the young man said. "You look as if you've been eating well for a long time. It shows in your skin and hair."

Stone put the East Zone marks in his wallet and walked to an open ticket window. He'd obviously have to stop eating for a few months to complete his disguise, he thought.

He bought a ticket to Alexander Platz, gave it to a portly, uniformed guard and climbed two flights of steps to the platform. It seemed colder now, and the wind was stronger. He lit a cigarette and stared over the expanses of the ruined, sprawling city, thinking that it looked like some grey jungle in the fading sunlight. When his train clattered into the station a few moments later, he went into an unheated coach and took a seat at a window.

There were two stops before the train entered the East Sector of the city. Stone saw the ruins of the Reich Chancellery, which were just over the border in the Russian Zone, and had noticed the scaffolding clinging to the sides of the Brandenburg Tor, and the bare stretches of the Tiergarten from which every tree and shrub had been uprooted for fuel during the Russian blockade in 1948.

Three stations later the train stopped at Alexander Platz. Stone joined a trickle of persons going down the steps to the street. There weren't many people on the pavements, he noticed, as he turned to his right and walked slowly towards a broad avenue about a hundred yards from the station. Four uniformed policemen stood at the crossroads, and Stone's first thought was that they were on traffic duty; but then he realised there wasn't a car in sight.

The avenue was Stalin Allee. He passed the policemen and turned to his left. Well, this was the first step, he thought. He recalled Peiner's directions: Right from the station to Stalin Allee. Left for two miles to Ullemstrasse. Left again four blocks to Number 113.

Everything seemed suddenly inevitable now. He had only to follow those directions to reach her home . . .

He began walking rapidly. It was uncomfortably cold now. He turned up his coat collar, put his hands in his pockets, and strode along, his heels resounding hollowly on the pavement. There were tram lines in the street, but he saw no trams, and no cars.

Banners and flags fluttered high above the street, suspended by ropes attached to buildings on either side. Stone read their legends with some difficulty in the gathering dusk.

MAKE FRIENDS WITH RUSSIA!

AMERICANS, GO HOME!

He also saw that the sides of most large buildings displayed graphs indicating the success of one five-year plan or another, and promises of even greater peace and plenty.

But the shops he passed were either shuttered up or else had only

a few lonely-looking items in the windows. The contrast between the shop windows and the boasts and promises floating in the air struck him as ludicrous.

He stopped at the next corner to rest a moment. Walking tired him quickly, and he had already come more than a mile. The street behind and ahead was empty. Stone glanced about at the stretches of neatly stacked rubble and torn buildings, fantastic now in the swiftly closing darkness, and suddenly he realised that his hands were trembling slightly. Nerves, not just the cold, he thought, surprised and troubled.

The silence was the thing. It stretched away on all sides, leaving him alone on the tiny island of sound that was his own breathing and heartbeat. He turned round in a full circle and the scrape of his shoes sounded loud and conspicuous. The only lights he could see were back at the Alexander Platz.

He felt now that there was something oppressive in the orderliness and neatness of the rubble. It had a final, finished look to it, as if it had been piled up deliberately, painstakingly—not to be touched again . . .

Half an hour later he reached Ullemstrasse. The white letters on a yellow sign gleamed through the darkness. Now it was left for four blocks, he thought, with mounting excitement. He was tired and his hands were numb from the cold, but the realisation that he was almost there, that he might see her in a few minutes, made him forget his discomfort.

This street had probably been pleasant enough before the war, but now practically every other building was in ruins. The trees that had lined the pavements had been sawn down for fuel, and only the stumps remained. Only a few lights showed behind shaded windows, and the street was empty, silent.

He stopped at the first house to find a number. It was 67, which meant, if the numbering was consistent, that he was on the correct side of the street. The next house was 69. Stone went on down the block, counting off two numbers for each house he passed. When he had reached the one which should be 113, a light showed on the first floor.

Stone glanced up and down the dark, silent street, then he walked quickly up three-stone steps to the entrance and pushed the vestibule door inwards.

A light flashed in his eyes, blinding him; Stone's breath caught in his throat involuntarily, and as he jerked back from the beam, his dud leg twisted under him and he fell sideways against the doorjamb.

The light held on his face for several seconds and then it probed down his body to his feet; behind it, in the reflection it cast, Stone saw a white-gloved hand and the glint of polished buttons.

"Whom do you want?" The voice was neither friendly nor unfriendly; it was low, flat, uncompromising.

Stone straightened himself slowly. "Willy Pilziner," he said, clutching at a name he remembered from school.

"What address do you want? What street?"

Stone couldn't think of a street name. The light came back to his eyes.

"What street?" The voice sounded curious, insistent.

"Leninstrasse. 113 Leninstrasse is where my friend lives." There must be a Leninstrasse, Stone knew, but for his sake there had better be one in this neighbourhood. If there weren't, the guard would know he was lying.

"You're four blocks from there," the policeman said. "This is Ullemstrasse." He gave him directions, and Stone thanked him profusely, backed out of the vestibule, and limped off down the street.

His heart was pounding at the closeness of his escape, but his chief reaction was anger at his own stupidity. Of course there would be guards. What had happened to his commonsense?

He walked away from her building in the opposite direction from which he had approached it, and passed two more buildings before coming to the next intersection. He turned to the left, looking for the alley behind her house. When he reached it he stopped, leaning against a fence to take the weight off his leg.

Waiting in the darkness, afraid to light a cigarette, cold and tired, he realised he didn't want to meet the guard who would surely be at the rear of her building. It wasn't exactly fear, but uncertainty, and the fear of fear, that made him reluctant to take this next, final step. Also, he knew now, his army brand of courage was different, and the difference was that then he was part of something big and if he got stopped there were a lot of men coming along behind him to finish the job. Now he was the whole works, and if he was stopped everything stopped. No one would come after him.

Finally he turned into the alley and it occurred to him that he might as well have his cigarette now, since he had no thought of hiding from the guard. He wanted to be seen, as a matter of fact.

Pausing, he lit a cigarette and moved on, his steps sounding clearly in the stillness. He stopped at the third building, before a door in a high wooden fence. The metal knob turned under his hand, but the door didn't give.

Stone knocked twice, sharply. Steps sounded behind the fence, the door was jerked inwards and a beam of light struck his chest, moved up to his eyes. Stone could see another white-gloved hand holding the torch, and the pale, triangular blur of the guard's face.

"I am a friend of Giselle Heilgen's," Stone said.

"You can't see her. Be on your way."

Stone couldn't judge the distance between himself and the guard because of the light in his eyes. He couldn't risk leaping at the man; if he missed he'd surely lose his balance. "I have to see her," Stone said. "You have no right to stop me."

"Didn't you hear what I said?" The light bobbed as the guard came closer. Stone saw a broad, full face, small eyes. He was a big man, as tall as Stone, and he looked formidable. "Let me see your identity card."

"Of course," Stone said, dropping his cigarette. The guard was within reach then, and Stone, without haste, brought his hands up in the darkness and caught him round the throat. The beam of the torch streaked upwards, then down, and Stone felt a stinging shock and pain above his left eye. His dud leg gave way beneath him, and he caught his balance just in time. The guard struck at him again with the torch, but Stone forced him down to his knees with a powerful wrench of his arms, and the torch hit his shoulders and spun to the ground.

The guard fought savagely. He threw himself backwards, pulling Stone on top of him, and his thumbs dug into Stone's face, searching for the eye sockets.

Stone rolled to the side to get away from the knees that were driving upwards into his groin. Panting heavily, he tightened his grip until the muscles of his arms and shoulders began to tremble. The guard pulled at his wrists, scratched the back of his hands, with fingers that were swiftly losing their strength. Stone knew it was just a matter of holding on, just a matter of time. A minute later, the man's body went limp, and his head crashed back against the frozen ground.

Stone got shakily to his feet, leaning against the fence until he got his breath back. The still-burning torch lighted the rear of the building, and a short flight of wooden steps. Stone picked it up, turned it off, and dropped it into his pocket. The darkness plunged back at him, and he stood quietly for several seconds, breathing deeply, listening and glancing up at the few lighted windows in sight. But everything was quiet; no faces appeared at the windows, nothing broke the icy stillness.

He bent over the guard, got an arm underneath him, hoisted him up over his shoulder. There was a wooden structure on his left, possibly a garage, and he put a hand against this for support as he made his way precariously to the stairs at the rear. He went up slowly, his free hand on the banister, and the guard's thick legs swinging awkwardly in front of him. The steps turned sharply and brought him to a narrow landing and a door.

This must be it, this has to be it, he thought, and knocked twice and waited, his breathing sounding loud and harsh in the silence.

There was no answer, no movement beyond the dark door. He might have got Peiner's directions wrong or maybe Peiner had deliberately misled him. No, that couldn't be it; this guard had seemed to know her name.

A voice behind the door said, "What do you want?"

"It's me, Stone. Open the door."

"What do you want?"

"For God's sake, open the door."

A bolt was withdrawn, and an edge of light appeared, widened; the girl's face was framed in this white rectangle. Stone pushed back the door and stepped into a small, cold, dimly lighted kitchen. She retreated from him, both hands moving instinctively to her throat. There was no recognition in her eyes.

Stone pushed the door shut with his shoulder and lowered the guard's long, heavy body to the floor. Straightening, he saw that something in her face had changed.

" You're the American," she said in a low voice.

" I came here to help you," he said.

" You can't help me." She made a quick, futile gesture with her hands. " You must leave."

" In a moment. What can I do with this character? " he said, nodding down at the guard on the floor.

" There's blood on your face. Are you hurt? "

" It's not bad. He hit me with his torch." He touched his head gingerly, felt the bump and the hardening blood that had run down his cheek. " It's all right. Get your coat on."

She turned away from him and put both hands to her face, then took them away quickly and shook her head. " It couldn't work. It's foolish, quixotic."

The last word surprised and angered him. He stepped over the guard and put his big hands on her shoulders. " Just listen to me," he said. " I should have helped you last night. Now it's going to be tougher. That's the only difference, though. There's not one damned thing foolish or quixotic about it. Don't you see that? "

She shook her head slowly, her eyes grave, her lips trembling. He hadn't been sorry for her the night before, or even this morning when he had known for sure that she was in trouble; she had seemed too strong for his pity. Now he was sorry for her, because she suddenly seemed small and tired.

He put his arms around her to comfort her, and she came closer to him, her fingers gripping the lapels of his jacket. " I'm afraid," she said.

" We've got a good chance," he said, and patted her shoulder. " There's no guard at the back now. We can reach the Western Sector in two hours. What shall we do with our friend here? "

She looked down at the guard. Her eyes were dry. She hadn't been crying, as he'd thought. " My bedroom is probably the best place," she said. " Can you manage him alone? "

Stone nodded. He hefted the man into his arms and followed her through a dark living-room and into a bedroom. She drew the curtains across the single window and snapped on a light, and he dumped the guard on the narrow bed. There was no other furniture in the tiny room except a chest of drawers, a table with books on it, and a straight-backed chair.

" Have you got any rope? The sash from a dressing-gown would do fine, or a couple of pairs of stockings."

" Yes," she said, and turned to the wardrobe door. But she stopped, raised a hand, and then snapped off the light. " Listen."

Stone had heard it too: a loud voice bawling at the rear of the building. He peered through the curtains and saw a light moving about in the dark yard. The girl's shoulder touched his and he drew her close to him. " What's up? " he asked.

"I should have remembered. The guard changes about this time every night."

Stone swore helplessly. They watched the light flashing about and heard the voice shout an indistinct name several more times; then the light disappeared into the alley.

"He'll report to his sergeant or lieutenant and they'll all be back to snoop around," Stone said. "We can't wait. Let's go."

She turned away, but he caught her hand. "Never mind," he said. He had heard voices from the alley. She returned to his side as three bobbing lights entered the yard.

"We're too late," he said.

The lights swept about the ground, up the back of the building. Stone dropped the curtain and moved away from the window. They could hear the voices in the yard very plainly.

"They're going to check all the flats," she said. "They think the guard might have gone in out of the cold and fallen asleep or something."

Stone rubbed his forehead, trying to think. Everything had suddenly gone wrong. "We can't let them find him here," he said. The thought was so obvious that it sounded faintly ludicrous. "What can we do?"

She laughed, and he didn't like the sound of it. "What can we do? That's wonderful, really wonderful. There's nothing to do, of course. Last night when it was a simple matter, you wouldn't help. You would rather believe that I was hysterical, and that it wasn't any of your business, and that there wasn't really any danger after all. Now when it's a hundred times worse you try to do something about it—with no plans, no resources, nothing but a righteous attitude. It's the grand fault of your country. It never sees the danger, or heeds the warnings, until the world is on fire." She turned away from him and let her hands fall to her sides. "Why did you come here? You've only got yourself into a mess."

"Well, your views on international affairs aren't going to get us out of it," Stone said. "How about that wardrobe? Is there room enough for the guard and me?"

"It's no use. They'll search it."

"Not if you use your eloquence on them instead of wasting it on me," he said angrily. "Tell them you heard the guard going upstairs ten or fifteen minutes ago. Tell them anything, but make it good."

He felt his way round the bed, picked up the guard, and carried him to the wardrobe. The girl opened the door, and Stone slid the man's body on to the floor. He climbed in after him and sat on his chest.

She closed the door, and he heard her light footsteps fading towards the kitchen. Then, ten seconds later, he heard the tramp of booted feet on the stairs and a sharp rapping on the kitchen door. The booted feet entered the kitchen, the floor creaking under their weight. He heard an indistinct rumble of words, lightened occasionally by Giselle's clear voice.

One of the men laughed, and Stone breathed more easily. They must be buying her story. Then the body beneath him twisted sharply, and he heard the man suck in a great lungful of air.

Stone struck down and, luckily, the edge of his palm hit the man's open mouth, smothering his shouts. Stone dug the thumb of his free hand into the guard's neck and leaned his weight forward as the man arched and twisted to throw him off balance. The teeth closed down on his hand. Stone forced back a cry of pain. His face was inches from the guard's face in the darkness. He said, " Keep still, or I'll kill you."

He eased the pressure on the man's throat to let him take a breath, and then he applied it again and the body under him relaxed. The man wanted desperately to breathe; nothing else mattered.

Stone held him that way, feeding him enough air to live on, until the booted feet tramped out of the flat and the kitchen door closed behind them; then he quickly switched both hands to the guard's throat and banged his head down three times on the wooden floor.

The wardrobe door opened. The girl said, " They've gone upstairs."

Stone slid out of the wardrobe, thinking he must look like a large crab. The girl took his arm. " I'm all right," he said, and got on one knee.

" I know," she said, helping him to his feet.

He followed her into the living-room, where she took her brown coat from a peg, and then into the kitchen. When they stepped out on to the narrow landing they heard voices above them, and the impatient shifting noise of heavy boots. The girl closed her door and they went slowly down the steps to the yard, their footsteps smothered by the loud, hasty interrogation that was going on at the second-floor landing.

Stone wondered if there was a guard in the alley. He wasn't up to much more; he was spent and tired. But the alley was beautifully silent and dark.

The girl caught his hand and said, " Follow me."

He did his best to keep up with her, but the effort was exhausting. At the first corner he stopped and leaned against a fence. A light was moving around in the alley at the back of the girl's flat. He could hear several voices shouting, the sound carrying clearly in the cold, still air. They had probably found the guard, he thought.

" Look, we don't stand a chance if we stick together," he said. " They'll seal off this area in a few minutes. You go alone, Giselle. I'll be all right."

" You'll be lost in two minutes. They'd have you in five. I know this neighbourhood. We have a chance of making it."

" They don't want me anyway," he said. He took a long breath. " You're the big prize. I'll give them a good story if they catch me, don't worry. Now beat it."

" You think you can't keep up with me? "

" Yes, I'm being righteous and noble. Typical American gesture. Please get the hell out of here, Giselle."

"No," she said. "You must come with me."

The shouts and noise from the other end of the alley were becoming disciplined and orderly, it seemed to Stone. Plans were being made, orders issued now, and there was less of the surprised, excited bawling.

"O.K.," he said. He knew she wouldn't go on without him, and the short rest had helped enormously. "I'll try, Giselle."

They followed the alley for two blocks and then cut through a yard to the next street to avoid a cruising police van. A siren sounded behind them and another took up the cry on their right, but it was impossible to judge whether they were a hundred yards or a mile away. They went on through an area that had been bombed almost flat. It was a business street and the merchants whose stores had been destroyed were doing business at wooden stalls, empty of all produce now for the night. There was a faint smell of sausages and briny pickled herring. The wind tore at the edge of the cardboard advertising signs tacked to each stall.

"This is the quickest way to Unter den Linden," she said.

"How far is it from here?"

"A mile and a half; then another half-mile to the Brandenburg Tor."

They were almost at the end of the third block when they heard a car approaching. Giselle took his hand and led him into the shadow of a building entrance that had been left standing. A police van pulled up at the crossroads and stopped not fifty feet from them. It was an ugly-looking vehicle, large and square, with a body of wood, painted yellow. Seven policemen climbed down from the rear steps. Three marched off to the right, and three to the left, and the remaining guard took a post in the middle of the street, his rifle slung in the crook of his arm. The police van started up, picked up speed, and disappeared.

From the doorway they heard the rhythmic tread of the policeman, and the sound of the police van, and then these sounds merged indistinguishably and faded into the dark silence.

Stone watched the single guard strolling back and forth across the street, his boots echoing slowly and clearly. There was little chance of trying to get past him, he knew. They were inside the net now, and it would be just a matter of time until the police began to tighten it.

Giselle touched his arm. She had opened the door behind them, and he followed her into a narrow, cold, brick-walled vestibule which had an open door at its far end. She caught his hand and said, "Stay close to me."

"Where are you going?"

Giselle didn't answer. She led him into a refuse-littered yard, along a narrow passageway and out to the next street. They stopped in the shadows of the passage and watched the guard at that crossing. He was pacing slowly, his heels sounding woodenly on the cold pavement.

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"We must cross this street," Giselle said. "Someone I know lives near here. We have to get inside. It is our only hope."

Stone glanced at the guard, and up and down the dark shadowy street, estimating their chances. In the stillness he could hear Giselle's breathing and the fast strong stroke of his heart. "Watch the guard," he told her. "Move slowly. If he looks towards you, stop. He'll probably spot you if you're moving, but not standing still. Get going. I'll follow."

She moved out from the shadows and into the street. Once she stopped as the guard turned and stared in her direction; but in ten seconds she had reached the other side and faded into the darkness. Stone took a long slow breath and started after her, moving his left leg with extreme care, and crouching low to minimise his silhouette.

The guard, he saw, was becoming nervous; he seemed to sense that something was wrong. He might have seen Giselle from the corner of his eye and dismissed it as an illusion. But he was worrying about it. He stood stock still, staring into the dark tunnel of the street. He worked the bolt of his rifle, sending a shell into the chamber with an ominous snicking sound.

"Halt!" he cried.

Stone froze, and turned his face away from the guard, into the darkness. That would give him away first, he knew—the pale blur of his face. The guard came towards him slowly, deliberately. He was only thirty feet from Stone when he again cried, "Halt!" But now there was a puzzled, questioning note in his voice. He hadn't seen him, Stone knew. He was obeying a nervous impulse, fighting phantoms. But if he came any closer . . .

Stone held his breath. The guard stopped, muttered something to himself, and walked back to the crossroads. By the time he got there, Stone had crossed the street and caught Giselle's trembling arm, and the two of them had slipped into the passageway between two dark buildings.

"How far is this house?" Stone asked.

"Not far." She caught his hand once more and he followed her to the alley. There they turned left and hurried through complete darkness.

It was a nightmarish trip; once Stone's foot struck a tin can and the clatter of it reverberated deafeningly in the silence. After about a hundred yards they arrived behind a tall building which had been reduced to a grotesque steel skeleton. She led him down a flight of damp concrete steps and rapped on a wooden door. A man's voice, high and frightened, answered her immediately.

Giselle said, "Open, please. It's Giselle—Giselle Heilgen."

A chain rattled and the door swung open. Stone followed her into a small cold room, lit by one candle that guttered on a table made from a packing-crate. The door closed behind them, and a thin unshaven man in a dirty brown sweater stared at them through the flickering gloom. He looked from Giselle to Stone and back to her again, his roughened hands working together nervously.

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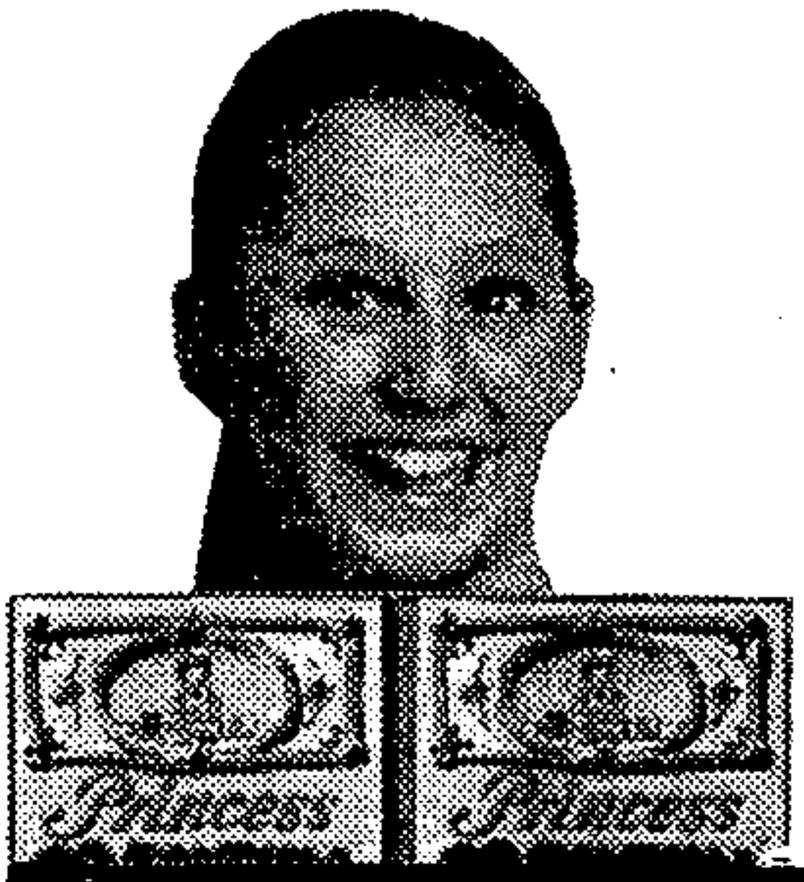

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"Why have you come here?" he said in a low, accusing voice. "We know of your trouble."

Giselle sat down wearily. "I'm sorry, Hans. I—I could think of nothing else to do."

A girl entered through a doorway at the end of the room. She was small, thinly built, and had a sullen face and thick black hair. "You shouldn't have come," she said, staring at Giselle. She looked at Stone with eyes that were bitter, tired, and frightened.

"I know, I know," Giselle said in an empty voice. Stone put his big hand on her shoulder and squeezed it gently.

"But why did you come here to us?" the man said.

"They are looking for us outside."

The man raised his head, listening to the sirens, and then he muttered, "My God! Where were you going, Giselle?"

"You shouldn't have come," the girl said again.

"We were trying to reach the West Sector," Giselle explained.

"Who is he?" The man looked uneasily at Stone.

"A friend, an American," Giselle said. She put both hands to her temples. "He has tried to help, but—"

"You bring an American here," the girl said in a suddenly strident voice. "Do you want to share your troubles with us, Giselle?"

"Now, now," said the man called Hans in a low, unhappy voice. He looked at the girl, shaking his head miserably. She refused to meet his eyes.

"Let's go," Stone said, patting Giselle's shoulder. "We'll have as much chance outside as in here."

"You shouldn't have come here," the girl muttered again in a sullen voice.

"Yes, I get your point," Stone said. "You've made it often enough." He stared at them with unfriendly eyes.

"Now, now," the man repeated in the same unhappy voice. He went to the girl and began talking to her in low tones. Finally she nodded sulkily, and he turned to Giselle. "Where is the police line?" he said.

"Two squares from here. They've put a guard about this whole neighbourhood."

"They will close in soon," Hans said. "From street to street, from house to house. If you got through the line, could you make it to the West Sector?"

"Yes, I think so, as long as they're certain we're *inside* the net."

"Very well." Hans wet his lips, glancing nervously from Stone to Giselle. "We—Marie and I—will lead you to the police line. We will let them arrest us. They are looking for a man and woman, so they will take us, of course. In that moment, while the guard is questioning us and summoning help, you can slip through. It is possible, I think."

There was silence when he finished. Stone cleared his throat and the sound was enormous in the cold, tiny room. "It's worth a try," he said. "What will happen to you two, though?"

"Nothing," Hans said. "Probably nothing. We will be taken to the police barracks and our identity cards will be checked. They will warn us about breaking the curfew, and that will be all."

"It's nothing, he says," the girl murmured, staring at him sullenly.

"Why are you doing it?" Stone said. It was an asinine question, but he felt he must know the answer.

"What difference does it make?" the girl said, looking at him from the corner of her eyes. "Somebody has to do it. We are the unlucky ones, that's all. I don't want to and neither does Hans, for all his talk of how easy it is. But we must."

She shrugged. "Some day it will be our turn, and we will get help. It's like a game, tit for tat maybe," she said cynically.

"Let us start," Hans said, blowing nervously on his hands. He picked up a cap and the girl took a short grey coat from a peg on the wall. Hans blew out the candle and opened the door. Stone felt cold air on his cheeks as they moved out into the darkness and crossed to the alley.

Hans and Marie set off rapidly, and Stone limped awkwardly to keep up with them, holding Giselle's arm for support. They left the alley fifty or sixty feet from the crossroads, and threaded through a back yard and a long passageway leading to the street. From here, at the point where they all stopped, Stone could see a guard pacing methodically to and fro at the corner.

Hans touched his arm. "Good luck," he said. "We will go now. Move fast."

There was no other word. Hans and Marie walked towards the corner and their voices, raised suddenly in conversation, cut cleanly through the silence. The guard's shout rang out, hoarse and surprised. Stone tensed for the sound of a shot as the man advanced on the couple. Hans began talking loudly in a scared voice and the girl began to cry. The guard yelled at them to shut up, then herded them towards the pavement and began blowing his whistle.

Stone squeezed Giselle's hand as they moved out from the passage and walked towards the intersection, keeping close to the shattered wall of the building. The guard's back was to them, and they were into the next block and almost out of the net before they heard the sirens answering his whistle.

They hurried on, crossing two more streets, and then, as they began backtracking and crisscrossing, Stone couldn't shake off the feeling that their haphazard route was just a matter of luck, although the girl seemed to know her way perfectly.

He was thinking in a confused fashion about the young couple. When they stopped to rest in the shadow of a giant air-raid bunker, he said, "You know, you can't generalise about people, Giselle."

"Yes, I know."

"Well, bear with me. I'm just learning."

It didn't seem very much to have learnt, he thought: just to know that anyone, regardless of his name, background, or geographical identity, had the capacity to act with honour, integrity, and

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courage. It was a pretty simple thing, but you had to find it out for yourself and pay a price for learning it. In his case the price had been danger.

Also, he thought, what he had learnt wasn't really such a simple thing. The people who hadn't learnt it, the ones who believed in easy generalisations, handy labels, they were the dangerous ones, because they were always used as the instrument, the lever, in every movement that deprived nations and peoples of their freedom. You couldn't have a dictatorship unless you first had a large uncritical mass of people ready to believe the lies about other people, eager and willing to assert their dependence on the one idea, the one authoritarian concept that would reduce their own thinking to zero. He knew that now . . .

Giselle took his hand. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," Stone said. "Let's go."

Twenty minutes later they came to the impressive width of Unter den Linden, with its massive government buildings, its flags and banners swinging in the cold wind.

"It's just another half-mile," she said.

"Isn't this quite a public street?"

"Yes, but it's dark, and it's a direct route to the Brandenburg Gate. Do you want to rest?"

"No, let's keep on."

They had covered three-quarters of the distance and were within sight of the Brandenburg Tor, when they heard the car behind them; it must have turned into Unter den Linden from a sidestreet, Stone thought, for it was on top of them before they heard it or saw its swinging flashlight probing the store fronts on the opposite side of the street.

Giselle began to run, holding his hand. He went along with her as fast as he could, but before they had covered twenty feet the light had swung over to their side of the street and was sweeping up the pavement behind them.

"Here!" she said, and pulled him towards a narrow lane that ran between two buildings. Stone hopped after her, but the light caught him before he got behind the angle of the wall. It swept over the lower half of his body, continued on for another few yards, and stopped. There was a shout, the sound of brakes applied powerfully, and the light flashed back, flooding the entrance of the lane.

They backed away from it into the darkness between the buildings, deeper into the narrow alley.

Fifty yards in, the walls ended and Stone saw that there was a bombed-out foundation behind the facade of the building. He heard booted feet clattering on the street, a hoarse, exultant shout, and then the air was split with a staccato burst of automatic-rifle fire. The bullets buzzed like wasps by his ears, and a needle-sharp spray of concrete stung his face. The guards hadn't seen them, he knew; but they were trigger-happy hoodlums firing at shadows.

Giselle sagged against him; her body in his arms was suddenly limp and fluid. Stone cursed and pulled her round a pile of stacked bricks and edged out along the top of the bombed-out foundation.

" Giselle! " he said, cold with fear. The police torch was shining down the lane they had left, and from its dancing reflections he saw that her eyes were open and that she was biting down on her lower lip. A thin, bright trickle of blood ran from her lips to her chin.

" It's all right," she said. " We couldn't have made it anyway."

" Where is it? "

" My arm, my left arm."

The bastards, the bastards, Stone thought, holding her against him tightly.

He dug the torch he had got from the guard at her flat out of his pocket and played it into the pit; it was ten feet deep, a vast earthen floor covered with broken bricks and rubble. Three feet above the floor a concrete shelving jutted out from the walls. This ledge ran round the inside of the foundation, but in several places it had crumbled and collapsed to the floor. He put the torch away and said, " O.K., quiet now."

From the street he heard the police approach, arguing loudly. He grabbed Giselle, swung her to the edge, and together they dropped into the pit. He landed on his good leg and sprawled forward on his face. His knee had twisted beneath him and a warm, liquid pain flowed up his leg as he helped her to her feet. Walking was nearly impossible, but he managed somehow to get her across the foundation and to drag both of them beneath the yard-wide shelving. There was room for them to lie under it, flattened against the wall.

The police came pounding down the lane and swept their torches over the pit. One went back to report that they had found nothing. In a moment he returned, grumbling, and said they were to search the foundation. The guard who had seen Stone came in for abuse from his comrades. He was the one, it was decided, to make the search. The others would let him down with their belts.

" There's no chance now," Giselle said. Her face was close to his, and he felt her short hair against his cheek. Her voice was very weak. " I'm sorry about the things I said in my house. You—you are brave and good. I thank you."

She moved away from him and Stone knew what she intended to do. " Now who's being noble? " he whispered, and put a hand gently over her mouth and pulled her against his chest. " No quixotic gestures, remember? "

She sagged against him and began to cry softly when he took his hand from her mouth.

Stone's heart jumped suddenly as something wet and cold touched his free hand. He jerked away involuntarily; a low, whining growl sounded, and Stone let out his breath with shaky relief. He put out a hand and found a small shivering dog crouching against the wall.

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"Easy, easy," he murmured to it. The dog mustn't bark. The animal crowded against him, his tail wagging a desperate response to the gentleness in Stone's voice.

"Another refugee—a dog this time," he whispered to Giselle.

"He'll bark, you know," she said, and there was a giddy, hysterical note in her voice.

It wouldn't make much difference, Stone thought. The guard's booted feet had struck the floor of the foundation, and he was sweeping his torch along the rubble-heaped floor and over the walls. It was a matter of luck now; everything depended on pure chance. If the dog barked, if the guard made a thorough search . . . And the guard was going to make a thorough search, he saw, and that was the end of it, for him, Giselle, everything.

The guard was going to show his companions, who were ridiculing him from the top of the pit, that he believed the evidence of his own eyes. He threw his light under the shelving and moved slowly along, showing by his intentness that he was prepared to find something.

Well, cheer up, Stone thought wearily, you'll find something all right. You'll be a hero. He didn't know what he'd do when the light hit his eyes; the chance of getting the guard's gun was remote but it was the only one he had left . . .

Suddenly, the dog beside him began to bark shrilly. Stone, moving without thinking, knowing only that he had to get rid of the dog before the guard could swing his light round, slapped the little animal sharply across

the rump. The dog dashed into the pit, yapping in fright, and the guard, cursing, picked him up in his torch beam and squeezed off a burst from his rifle. The dog, kicking weakly, yelped once more, wildly, and then fell on his side.

The guards above were laughing. "That's what you saw," one of them called out. "A bloodthirsty dog."

"No, I saw a man," the guard in the pit muttered stubbornly; but his determination melted under the mockery of his comrades. After a last thoughtful look round, he allowed himself to be hauled out of the pit.

The police stamped out of the lane, laughing among themselves. There was more talking and laughing in the street, and the engine of the police van turned over and roared into life. The sound of the engine stayed in the cold still air for a long while, but finally it faded away and there was nothing left but silence.

Stone exhaled, then twisted to face Giselle. "Let's see about your arm."

They got the coat off, and Stone ripped the dress away from her arm. The wound was ugly and had bled a lot. He couldn't tell if the bullet had struck the bone. He put on a tourniquet, using his handkerchief and a piece of wood he found on the ground. Giselle turned her face away and put her free hand to her forehead.

"Damn it, I'm sorry," Stone said. "I'm no doctor."

"It's all right," she said, but her voice was very light and thin.

He put the coat about her shoulders and moved to her other side so that she could rest against his chest. He got out his cigarettes, lit two, and gave her one. "We'll relax a little before the big push."

They smoked a moment in silence. Stone stretched his legs in front of him and rubbed the knee he had twisted. "If you'd given yourself up they'd have known I was here, of course."

"I didn't think about that. I didn't want them to get you. It seemed important for you to be free," she said.

"We're all important," he said. "I must tell you about the philosophic binge I've been on since our talk in the taxi. I'm not over it yet. It's important that everyone has a crack at being free."

He laughed without humour. "Pretty deep, isn't it? Maybe I should write a book."

"I don't understand you."

"Forgive me," he said in a different voice. "This is just nervous release. What will you do now, Giselle?"

"I don't know."

"Will those characters keep after you?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then you haven't a chance."

"I can take care of myself."

"Oh, sure," he said.

"Don't say it like that, please. Why are you angry at me?"

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm annoyed all right, but not at you." He put out his cigarette. "O.K.? Ready to take another crack at it?"

He held her close to him as they groped their way to the rear of the pit. Stone's torch picked out a heap of fallen masonry and they clambered up to ground level. They walked silently through an adjacent yard and came on another alley that brought them back to the dark width of Unter den Linden.

Stone stopped and leaned against the wall of a building.

" Are you all right? " she said.

" Sure, I'm fine," he said. " I was just thinking. Can't think and walk at the same time. It's psychosomatic, I guess." He put his hands on her waist. " You're going to marry me, Giselle."

" That's idiotic! You don't mean it! "

" It's not idiotic, and I mean it. You need help, Giselle, and rest. We can fix up the marriage at the Embassy, check you into a hospital, and be on our way home in a week."

She smiled and said quietly, " Just like that, eh? Efficient, businesslike, no wasted effort."

" Just like that," he said.

" You're not in love with me, by any chance? "

" Probably not, but—"

" Then you're sorry for me," she said.

He was suddenly angry. " You're damn right I'm sorry for you," he said. " I'm sorry for anyone who's hounded, locked up, and shot at by these subcretin bully boys. They make a sweet world for people, don't they? I'm sorry for you, and for anyone else they've got their hooks into. Even thc dogs here don't have a chance."

She started to speak but he shook his head stubbornly. " We're clearing out. We'll fight them, if we have to, from a place where we can do some good. Not here where we haven't a chance.

" Now listen hard. About loving you, I said probably not—then you cut in. Well, let me finish. Probably not, but I could, Giselle. It might take time, all of a few days even. Maybe not that long." He bent and kissed her cold soft lips and then smiled into her eyes. " You'll like it, you'll see. You'll like being a quixotic American, see if you don't."

She looked away from him and said in a low voice, " I think I will, I think I will:"

" O.K., let's get out of this godforsaken place then," Stone said, taking her good arm firmly in his hand.

They turned into the wide, silent street and walked towards the Brandenburg Tor. Following the pavement round the bomb-shattered gate they came to the street that divided the Eastern and Western Sectors of Berlin. Fifty yards away was a West Berlin police detail, but between Stone and Giselle and the police strolled a husky young East Berlin guard, a rifle slung over his back. He watched Stone and Giselle approach, curious but not particularly concerned.

Stone knew that the border hadn't been closed yet, for the police in the East would be sure that they had bottled up Giselle's neighbourhood. Also, crossing from East to West wasn't too

difficult; this was a fact that confused tourists and inclined them to believe that perhaps the stories they heard of the Russians were just melodramatic inventions.

What they didn't understand was that an East German could cross into the West all right—if he was prepared to say good-bye to friends and family for ever, and leave them as hostages with the Eastern police. This was what kept them in line. Also, as in Giselle's case, they had no place to stay in the Western Zone, no security, no official life, no paper identity. The barrier was there all the same, a high, impassable one, built of fear for one's self and loyalty to one's friends and family.

"Gute Nacht," Stone called to the guard, and threw him a casual salute.

The guard stared at them for a few seconds, then nodded and strolled on, blowing on his cold hands.

"You've just missed your chance to be promoted sergeant, my friend," Stone said softly.

He put his arm tightly, and with a sense of permanence, about Giselle's waist as they crossed the border and entered the free sector of Berlin.

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★ ***Brilliant new novella by H. E. BATES complete in next month's Argosy***

SOLUTION to LEISURE PLEASURE on page 30

1. *Clammy chamois*
2. *Biting writing*
3. *Blimey, Limey!*
4. *Kisses Mrs.*
5. *Skipper's nippers*
6. *Shriller triller*
7. *Pander gander*
8. *Wizard gizzard*
9. *Rookie's bookies*
10. *Dizzy Lizzy*
11. *Chicken pickin'*
12. *Peeling feeling*
13. *Injure ginger*
14. *Tipping dripping*
15. *Scanty panty*
16. *Partridge cartridge*
17. *Lacking backing*
18. *Holly lolly*
19. *Stitches breeches*
20. *Perky turkey*

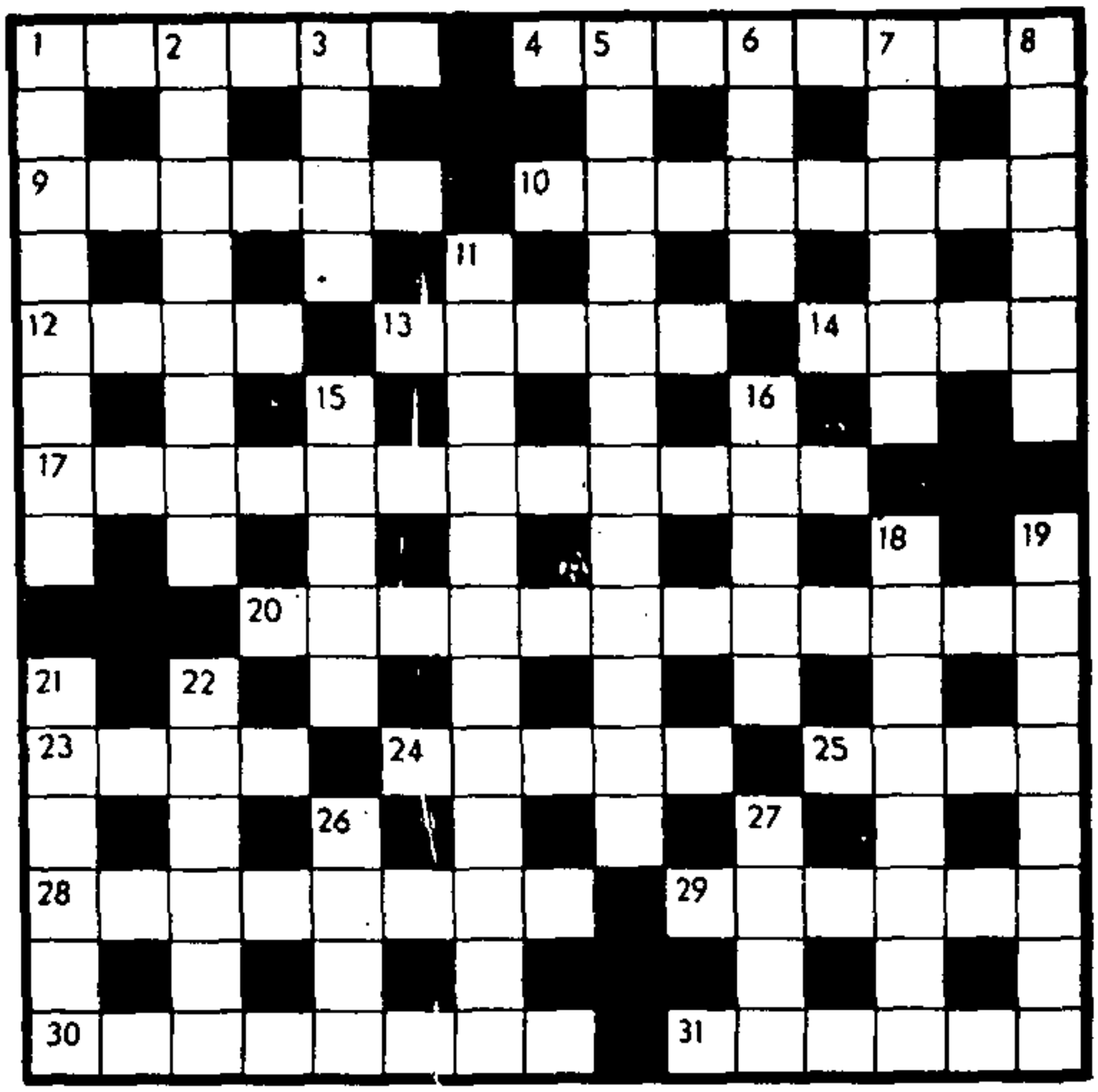
SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Sultan.* 4, *Crackers.* 9, *Ormolu.* 10, *Mincepie.* 12, *Bank.* 13, *Pride.* 14, *Drag.* 17, *Laurel wreath.* 20, *Blank cheques.* 23, *Hail.* 24, *Spell.* 25, *Tree.* 28, *Intrepid.* 29, *Cornet.* 30, *Paradise.* 31, *Pauses.*

Down. 1, *Snowball.* 2, *Luminous.* 3, *Able.* 5, *Reindeer calf.* 6, *Coco.* 7, *Export.* 8, *Sledge.* 11, *Growing pains.* 15, *Peels.* 16, *Steel.* 18, *Currants.* 19, *Asbestos.* 21, *Shrimp.* 22, *Winter.* 26, *Weed.* 27, *Soda.*

ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution on page 143



ACROSS

1 Turkey's head—at one time (6).

4 They're crazy for Christmas (8).

9 Our Mol would like this gilded gift (6).

10 Cockney's eye this titbit (8).

12 There may be a run on it, now (4).

13 —— of lions, perhaps (5).

14 Pull the old mail coach (4).

17 Leafy trophy (6, 6).

20 Fill them up—and what a present ! (5, 7).

23 Greetings, you shower (4).

24 Panto fairy's magic (5).

25 Always well presented ! (4).

28 Upset pin tried to be bold (8).

29 Musical ice-cream ? (6).

30 It's heavenly! (8).

31 Father avails himself of these rests (6).

DOWN

1 Christmas dance—in the open ? (8).

2 Lit up like a Christmas tree (8).

3 Fit to upset bale (4).

5 Young Rudolph (8, 4).

6 The officer repeats himself—what a nut ! (4).

7 Send out for former wine (6).

8 Boy's present—on the shelf mainly (6).

11 Schoolboy's after-dinner symptoms ! (7, 5).

15 Robert and John sleep upside down (5).

16 —— one's heart, but not away (5).

18 Mongrel raves about the dried fruit (8).

19 Ideal material for Santa's suit (8).

21 Small chap is half devilish (6).

22 This season is written without a *t* and all muddled up (6).

26 Remove the drug (4).

27 It may add to the party spirit (4).

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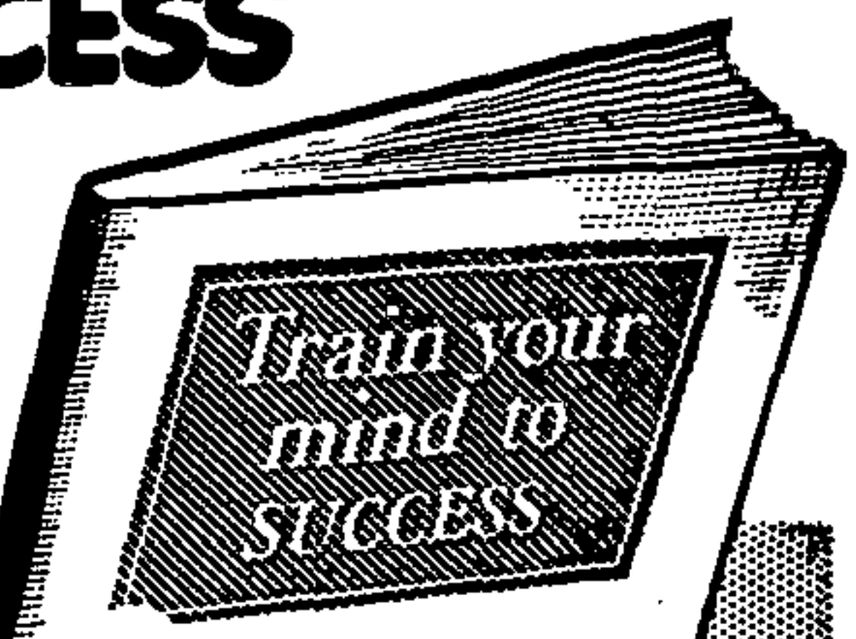

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